SUSPENSE and

argosy

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AUGUST—2/6

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argosy

Vol. XXII No. 8 AUGUST 1961

Log Book	*Decorations by Graham*	4
Short Cut	Arturo Vivante *Illustration by Porter-G*	7
Bee-Line		14
A Proper Charley	Youngman Carter	15
Merchant of Dreams	John Salt	21
Passion Fruit		40
Chelsea Brat	Jane Gaskell *Illustration by Larkin*	43
The Case of M.J.H. (Alfred Hitchcock's Choice)	Henry Slesar	57
Out of the Sun	Evan Hunter	65
Rainbow Game	David Walker *Illustration by F. Griffin*	76
The 2.20 from Dinas	E. L. Malpass	89
Brighton Front	*Illustrations by Ian Ribbons*	100
Crowd of Two	Ken Hardman	103
No Other Elephant	Gerald Sparrow *Illustration by Mary Dinsdale*	110
Next Month's Argosy		132
Argosy Crossword		144

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Log Book

SCIENCE keeps marching on; two American scientists have discovered moon dust lying about up there in the top layer of the earth's atmosphere (trampled in by those dusty-booted Russians?) and any time now international commissions will have to decide whose job it is to dust the Heaviside Layer once a month and keep it silicone-polished. (Incidentally we bet that, like us, you thought that name derived from some special kind of heavy air; well you're wrong, it's from Heaviside, the physicist.)

Furthermore in the same week pop-eyed readers of national newspapers learnt that 80 lb. of dehydrated frozen spinach packs into a wad the size of a book; that a pretty woman walking briskly in a nylon slip can generate 600 volts of electricity; that automatic machines will soon be vending (revolting word—imagine "Vend that thou hast and give to the poor") vending roast chickens and model dresses; that jelly has been smeared on ledges in Trafalgar Square to discourage pigeons and starlings; and that strawberries with tiny roots on their leaves resulted from ultra-modern agricultural sprays.

Private life will soon be as absorbingly full of unexpected incidents as a Pinter play; let us conjure up a simple situation and see how scientific progress is going to throw it around.

We'll suppose that Jim has just come out of gaol with remission for good behaviour; his wife Ann in the meantime has taken up with beat-type Stan; Jim's old enemy Wits Lugg is laying for him with a gun; his old flame Lydia is also laying for him.

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See? A nice, simple three-act situation.

But what happens?

When Jim bursts into the penthouse, ready to surprise his wife's lover, Stan, instead of lying in bed playing the guitar as he should be, is angrily shovelling out the pigeons who keep sliding in off the roof.

Sample dialogue:

JIM: *Who are you?*

STAN: (lightning presence of mind) *I'm the pigeon man.*

JIM: *Oh, you're the pigeon man, are you?*

STAN: *Yes. The pigeon man, that's who I am.*

JIM: *The pigeon man. That's who you are, is it?*

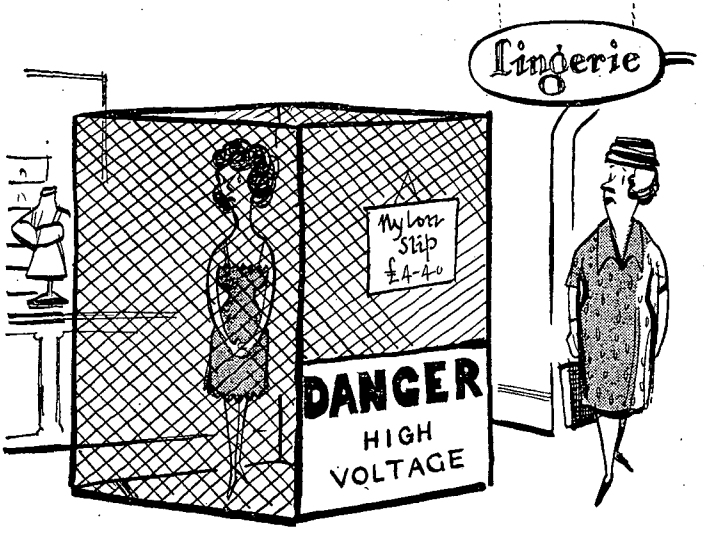
STAN: *Yes, I'm the pigeon man.*

(Slam of door downstairs. Both men listen.)

JIM: (to himself) *That's Ann's step.*

(Stan lights cigarette nervously.)

ANN: (from downstairs) *Shan't be a minute. Just popping some things from the vending machine into the oven.* (She appears, zipping herself into new Paris model, starts at sight of Jim but makes superb recovery.) *Honey! I've brought these strawberries to celebrate your homecoming.*



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JIM: (suspiciously) *They've got legs on their leaves.* (To Stan) *Like strawberries?*

STAN: *Yes, I'm partial to strawberries.*

JIM: *Oh, you like them, do you? Strawberries?*

STAN: *Strawberries, yes, I've quite a penchant for strawberries.*

(He eats one and drops dead.)

JIM: (to Ann) *You meant those for me, did you?*

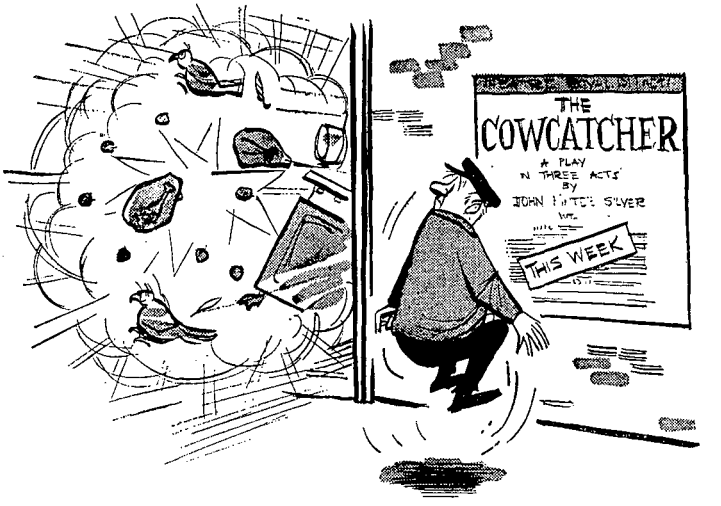
ANN: *Oh I—*

Her words are drowned by the roar as the gas stove explodes and eighty pounds of spinach fly through the flat. Ann is killed by a hurtling chicken; Wits Lugg, hiding in the kitchen cupboard, is gassed. Jim escapes with Lydia, who has been pacing up and down the passage, but as they go down in the lift her suspender knocks against the lift-handle and a 600-volt spark from her petticoat ends the whole play in the middle of Act I. The only survivors are the pigeons who have flown to the park. Pigeons on the grass, alas, as Gertrude Stein said, and how right she was.

This play is called *The Cowcatcher*, but that bit would have come in Act 3.

Never mind the disappointment, dear readers; you can always read right to the end of Argosy. JOHN SILVER

Horatio



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SHORT CUT

" This damn map," he said

BY ARTURO VIVANTE

BUT for the map, the incident wouldn't have happened.

It was one of a series of road maps that a drug company had sent him; being a doctor, he received all sorts of unsolicited gifts.

First had come a map of Italy—his practice was in Rome—then one of France. By the end of the year he had maps of all Europe. They weren't very good, though. They gave the main roads, the towns, and the mileage, but no markings to tell a plain from a mountain, and no indication of heights.

It was the drug company's map he was using on the trip back to Italy from England, where they had gone for Christmas and New Year. She was twenty-eight—a slender, pensive American girl with long chestnut hair. He was a few years older, dark and broad-shouldered.

He and the girl had met two summers before, when she had fallen ill while in Rome as a tourist.

He had seen her a few times, and an attachment had developed between them that soon brought them to a relationship different from that of doctor and patient.

After much debate, she had left for New York on the day for which her passage was scheduled.

But the next spring she had surprised him in Rome. She had looked for a job that would keep her in Italy, and at last she found one in Bologna.

It was a long way from Rome, but once or twice a month, at weekends, she would come down for a visit.

His car was a small green twenty-year-old convertible, all nicks and patches, which he had bought two years before from a secondhand dealer in Rome. She thought it was cute.

Because of its smallness and age it was out of the contest, out of the tedious fray that cars, especially in Italy, have with one another. It was only a match for bicycles.

Uphill, the cyclists often raced with it in sport, and more often than not overtook it. Sometimes, on small country roads, big

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sheepdogs would chase it and keep barking alongside for hundreds of yards. It was the only car he had driven that spared butterflies—they always had time to get out of its way—and this was one reason he kept it.

It often broke down. Once, in Piazza di Spagna, during the afternoon rush hour, the front axle broke, and the car went down like a horse on its knee. Before leaving on the trip to England, however, he had had it checked and had bought two new tyres. Except for a puncture and a consequent crack in the wheel rim at Dieppe—they had had to buy a new wheel—the car had given them no trouble whatever.

To cross the Alps on their way to England, they had loaded the car on a freight train and gone through the St Gotthard tunnel. Now, coming back, they planned to avoid the Alps by driving down to the Côte d'Azur and the Italian Riviera. But at Lyons, instead of going south along the Rhône to the coast and then east to Nice, a love for short cuts induced him to drive directly south-east towards Grenoble and Nice. As a result, about thirty miles out of Lyons the Alps began to loom up, their white crests hovering over the dim horizon in the east.

"Are we going to have to go over them?" she said.

"No, no," he reassured her. "We'll be skirting them."

The lacy white fringe of peaks became clearer and clearer, then disappeared behind a brown, wooded mountain that stood in the way. They began to climb this one, and for a long time the Alps remained hidden. When they reached the top they saw them again, but now they weren't just to the east; they were also to the north and the south.

"We *are* going to have to go over them; they're on all sides of us. Look at those," she said, pointing at some particularly high peaks to the south-east, on the other side of the valley. "Do we have to go over those?"

He stopped the car and studied the map. "I thought we'd be able to skirt them," he said. "But now I don't know. This damn map—I wish I'd bought myself a good one."

"In America," she said, "you can get good maps at petrol stations, free."

"Here you have to pay for anything decent," he said. "Well, we'll find out in Grenoble," he added, slapping the map down on the floor of the car.

Going down the mountain, they had a flat tyre. He found that the rim of the wheel had cracked, as in Dieppe. Metal fatigue, he thought, and proceeded to change it. In Grenoble, he stopped at the first garage they came to, and they bought another new wheel. This left them with only about a fiver between them.

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He asked the mechanic who fixed the tyre about the way, and the mechanic replied that if they were going to Italy they might as well cross the main chain of the Alps to Piedmont as drive to Nice. "To go to Nice," the mechanic said, "you have to go over the Alps, too, and that way they are higher."

"Oh," he said, and looked at her.

"Yes," the mechanic continued, "and with this car, I'm afraid . . ." He didn't finish his sentence, but just gave a second-hand dealer's disparaging kick to the bumper.

"Perhaps we could put the car on a train," he said. "Is there a railway tunnel through this part of the Alps?"

"There's the Fréjus," the mechanic said. "But it's a long way from here—at Modane. If you want to avoid the Alps, you have to go back to the Rhône."

"We'd better," she said.

"I don't feel like driving back to the Rhône," he said. "I'm tired." Suddenly all trace of weariness went out of his voice. "Let's go over the Alps."

"I knew you'd say that," she said. "I knew all along that what you really wanted was to cross the Alps!"

"Yes, let's cross them," he said. The thought made him feel buoyant. He saw the fringe of peaks, the many summits, fantastically white; he was almost level with them. "Let's!" he said. "The map didn't show them, and I thought we could drive to Nice and stay clear of them, but now—"

"That map!" she said. "Why don't you buy a good one?"

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"It's not much use buying one now; the mistake's been made. Look, there's one," he said, pointing at a wall map in the office of the garage.

They both went over and looked at it. Grenoble was in a narrow valley. Its river, the Isère, flowed deviously south-west towards the Rhône, and the only mountain around that was a reasonably light shade of brown was the one they had come over. All the others were a disquieting dark brown. Here and there, whitish-blue streaks denoted glaciers.

He took her hand. "Let's go straight to Italy, over the Alps," he said.

"No," she said. "It's mad at this time of the year in that car."

"Our back tyres are good. We could get chains . . ."

He asked the mechanic how much chains cost, but found the price was more than they could afford.

They left the garage and called at the municipal tourist bureau to inquire about road and weather conditions.

"The Alpine passes are open," the clerk said. "Naturally, conditions may change from hour to hour."

"Let's go," he said enthusiastically.

"You've never driven over the Alps, have you?" she asked him.

"No, never," he said, as though that were a good reason for doing so now.

"I don't think we should go."

"We practically have to. It's the quickest and cheapest way, and we haven't much money left, or much time."

"I don't have to."

"No, you don't. But I feel as if I have to cross them if it's the last thing I do—I feel sort of committed to cross them."

"Oh, all right," she said with a sigh. "I'll go with you."

It was rather late, and they decided to spend the night in Grenoble. They drove about the darkening town, along old sombre streets and dim alleys that sometimes led to squares and sometimes had desolate endings one wanted to get quickly away from. Every once in a while they would come to the river, like a wider street . . .

In the morning, they checked at the tourist office again.

"The passes are still open," the clerk said.

He rubbed his hands together with satisfaction. "At eight o'clock tonight we'll be in Turin and dine at the Cambio," he said, "near the table they still keep set for Cavour."

They hurried out of the office. On the pavement, she paused. First she looked at him and then at the car.

"You haven't much confidence in it, have you?" he said.

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"Yes, I have," she replied, and got in.

It was cloudy but not very cold as they left Grenoble and followed the course of the river Romanche towards the heart of the Alps. Very gradually the valley narrowed to a gully. Soon they met the first snow. At first it was just on the sides of the road, but later, as they continued to climb, it stole more and more of the surface until soon there was only left a wavy, bare strip in the middle. Then this, too, disappeared and the road was all white.

"We haven't met a car for quite a long while," she said. "Do you think the pass is open?"

"Well, there are still tracks," he replied, "and it isn't snowing."

They passed a cluster of abandoned, doorless, shutterless houses. "Open but not inviting," he said.

Below them, from time to time, they could hear the rushing of water. Notices posted along the road warned against walking down to the river or along its banks, as sudden floods took place when water was let out from a hydro-electric plant farther up. They came to the plant, a dam, and a reservoir.

Higher up, the fir trees, which below had been thick and healthy, became more and more stunted. Soon there were no more trees, or bushes, or any form of vegetation that showed above the snow. The mountain looked bleak above and below. A few hundred yards away, it blended imperceptibly with the sky. They couldn't see farther, in any direction.

Rare flakes of snow hit the windscreen. The road was now a channel of hard-packed snow that zigzagged up the white slope. On either side were mounds of cleared snow where the plough had gone through, but they were not conspicuous in all the whiteness, and it would have been difficult to keep to the road if some red dye hadn't been thrown here and there to mark its borders. The dye tinged the snow and kept them on the right path, but it was tiresome to be reminded that there was need for such a measure, especially since the flakes, which were falling faster now, threatened to cover it. Already it was hard to tell whether there were any recent tyre tracks on the snow.

They went up in first gear, at all the speed he could get from the worn little engine, the arrow of the speedometer oscillating between five and fifteen miles an hour. From time to time, whenever the tyres lost their traction, the arrow would dip and strike zero, the car would almost stop, the tyres would whine, and they would look at each other, then breathe with relief as the spinning ceased and the car moved forward again.

On one side—the left or the right, depending on the zigzag—there was the steep white slope that seemed to have no top; on

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the other, the steep white slope that seemed to have no bottom. The snow that had been cleared off the outer side of the road had been dumped or had fallen down the incline, and there was no mound to protect them from skidding over the edge. He steered to keep close to the inner side of the mountain. They came to a stretch where the slope below them was precipitous.

"If we go over," he said, "they'll find us next summer."

She refused to look.

They followed the red marks and were grateful for them. Without skidding or stalling, the car continued up. He wanted to say something about it, praise it, tell her what a good car it was, but he was superstitious enough not to do so. They just went on and on, up and up, zigzag after zigzag, until at last they reached the top.

"Col du Lautaret," a sign read, and gave the height. It was nearly seven thousand feet.

They started descending. "Briançon is only a few miles away," he said. "We'll be in Italy soon."

If he put the brake on, the car skidded, so he cautiously drove down in low gear. They came to a plateau, a stream, and then to the small town of Briançon. There they stopped at a petrol station near a café.

"How far is the Italian border?" he asked the man at the pump.

"Five miles, but I don't think the pass is open."

"What pass?"

"The Pass of the Montgenèvre."

"You mean to say there's another pass? I thought we had done all the climbing."

The man laughed. "No," he said. "You have only done half of it. There it is—the Montgenèvre," and he pointed east.

Faintly, one could see the wooded base of a mountain.

"And you say the pass is closed?"

"Yes, I think so."

Two men, in different cars, stopped at the garage. One said the pass was open; the other said it was not. Both were vague.

He looked at her.

"I am not going over another pass," she said. "One is enough."

"Is there a train to Italy from here?" he asked the man at the pump.

"No. The train goes to Gap."

"Gap," he said. "That's way back inside France. It's no good taking a train."

"Yes," she said.

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"I am going on."

"I am not."

"Oh, come with me," he said. "We've gone so far together, and now there's only this little stretch of five miles."

"No."

"Well, I'll go alone," he said, and looked east at the mountain.

She stood ready to leave, her mind divided; then at last she said, "I'll go with you."

They had a cup of coffee and hurried on. "We must reach the top before the temperature falls," he said, "or we'll never make it. It's almost three o'clock."

The Montgenèvre was easy compared to the Col du Lautaret. It wasn't bleak and desolate. There were trees all the way, and he had the feeling that if the car should skid off the road, the trees would hold them. "This road's a cinch," he said.

"Oh," she said, disapproving. She didn't like to hear him use American slang.

Near the top, icicles bigger than he had ever seen hung from a rock. They had blue reflections.

"I didn't think blue ice really existed," she said, looking pleased.

At the top, on another rock, a huge inscription said that Napoleon had taken this route to invade Italy and Austria in 1796. For a moment he could almost see the army trailing its cannon, Napoleon ready to swoop.

They crossed into Italy halfway down the mountain, at a place called Claviere, and found themselves in the midst of parked cars, buses, and people in ski clothes. There was a bakery and coffee shop. He parked the car and they went in and had a tangerine punch. The place was run by a Neapolitan couple. In a husky voice, the husband complained to them about the confinement and heights to which necessity had brought him. Yet the café seemed to be doing very well.

With cars in front and behind them, they descended the Montgenèvre. Night fell as they reached the foot. They crossed a river. And still there was another mountain, but it was low—no higher than the one they had gone over before Grenoble. At last they reached the plain. She was tired, and they drove in silence towards Turin. From time to time he looked at her and wondered if she were sleeping.

"Are you awake, Chestnut?" he said.

She stirred and looked at him.

He glanced at her, then resumed looking at the road in front of him, flat and smooth.

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"What?" she said.

"I just wanted to know if you were sleeping."

"Oh," she murmured and sat back, bundling herself up in her blanket.

He looked at her again. It was good to have her beside him. He thought of the first time he saw her in his surgery; he thought of the way she had surprised him, coming back from America; of her journeys from Bologna to Rome; of her sitting beside him wrapped up in a blanket in the small seat of the shaky, cold car each day of this long journey; of her going with him into hotels that she would never have gone into alone; of her weathering his moods, his complaints, his impatience; of her agreeing to go over the Alps. "Chestnut," he couldn't help saying again.

"Yes?" she said, peeking out of her blanket.

"No, nothing; I'm sorry," he said.

By eight o'clock they were in Turin, at the Cambio, sitting near the table set for Cavour . . .

Not long after this trip, they were married.

"Who went over the Alps with me?" he would say to her sometimes.

"I did," she would reply.

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BEE-LINE

Spelling, humble, bumble, or sewing, everybody's got some bee in his bonnet. If, however, our hive turns out to be a hornets' nest, buzz off to page 39

1. *"How doth the little b. b . . ." Can you supply next line?*
2. *Which Roman god was fed by bees in infancy?*
3. *He on honeydew hath fed—but this stuff isn't so ethereal as it sounds. What is it?*
4. *A joss-house is:*
   (*a*) *an opium den;*
   (*b*) *a Chinese temple;*
   (*c*) *a large skep. Which?*
5. *The Blue Bird and the Life of the Bee have something in common—what?*
6. *Which famous composer wrote the B Minor Mass?*
7. *Which philosopher is said to have had bees settle on his lips as a child, indicating that he would become famous for his honeyed words?*
8. *C is* 100, *L is* 50—*but what does the Roman numeral B stand for?*
9. *What is* (*i*) *a B & S;* (*ii*) *the four B's essential for social success?*

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A PROPER CHARLEY

"See you Thursday," he said.
"Two 'am, one corned, with mustard."

BY YOUNGMAN CARTER

IF YOU turn left out of the prison gates the road runs fairly steeply uphill into a grim hinterland of Victorian suburbs where the bomb damage still reminds one of rotting teeth—an illusion aided by the untamed weeds. To the right the slope is gentle and from the far end the rumble of buses, a new petrol station, and a straggle of sidestreet shops give a suggestion of life. Halfway down, where the pavement widens a trifle, stands Bert's Coffee Bar, a stall on jacked-up wheels, open day and night, under the personal supervision of Bert Maxton Jnr. himself.

Those who leave gaol early on rainy mornings, suddenly finding themselves strangers in these parts, turn right without exception. Mr. Maxton's establishment has therefore become, through the years, a certain rendezvous for those making their discreet exit and for any friends who are forming a welcome committee. A couple of taxis usually make their headquarters here and do a modest trade, especially on visiting days.

Bert's weatherbeaten awning with its thin flapping sides also makes an excellent hide for journalists covering executions and the release of prisoners who are still newsworthy. In its offbeat way this squalid little shelter is quite famous, and many a good story has been picked up there in the small hours by perceptive newspapermen.

Business of this sort took me there that Wednesday morning. Prisoners are usually released at seven sharp and today's example was quite a celebrity in his particular world. At any rate, my editor thought so and sent me off at the inglorious hour of six-thirty to cover the dubious event.

The halfhearted dawn was scarcely clear of the sky at that hour and it was of course raining. Even to think of this area without drizzle is an impossibility: it must have the highest rainfall in all suburban London.

I was not quite the first on the scene, for a little runt of a man was standing in the best corner, nearest the urn and out of the wind, reading a dog-eared paper and eating a coconut bun

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which looked as if it had started life as a bedroom slipper for an out-of-work stripteaser.

I greeted Bert respectfully as a valued friend and had some coffee. He is a large tub of a man who looks like Mr. Noah in a grey apron. He must be very tall, for with the added height of his stall he towers above his customers, a fact which is useful to him on occasions. It may be that he has legs and feet, but they have never been seen.

"Morning, Mr. C.," he said. "Keeping busy?"

I explained diffidently that I was still alive, sufficiently at least to complain about my job and the kind of weather he always provided. I hoped to drink my coffee in silence and to keep a cautious eye on the little door in the grim castle wall just up the road, but my fellow customer had other views.

"Journalist, ain't yer?" he said, and peered up at me from above thick steel-rimmed spectacles. He had a straggling walrus moustache, damp at the edges, and a disgustingly rheumy sniff.

I grunted some sort of agreement and he continued half at me and half to himself, with Bert above us as the arbiter.

"I've seen 'em all," he said. "Ole Bill Forsdyke, who used to come up 'ere for the 'angings. Dead now, ole Bill is, on account of 'is chest I shouldn't wonder. And Mr. Simmonds, a right gent 'e was, gimme 'alf a dollar many a time for a tip-off. 'E's dead now, come to think of it, ain't 'e, Bert?"

"That's right," said the proprietor. "Pneumonia took 'im off, two years gone. You knew him of course, Mr. C.?"

"Course 'e did," said the little man. "E's like me, knows everything, I shouldn't wonder. Now—" he hunched himself still farther into the upturned collar of his mackintosh—"I can tell you why you're 'ere, I can. You're 'ere to see Mr. Anthony Augustus Fitzroy Stevenson come out, ain't yer? You'll try and talk to 'im and you'll sign 'im up for a life story in ruddy great 'eadlines, I shouldn't wonder."

I was glad that there were only the three of us present, for the little man was uncomfortably near the mark.

"I seen 'im at the Bailey," said my companion, suddenly putting on a remarkable simulation of judicial tones. "You are a proper two-timer what 'as betrayed 'is birthright. You 'ave deliberately associated yourself with a gang of right wrong 'uns, a collection of Charleys of inferior intelligence what 'ave escaped detection thanks to your not 'aving split on 'em. So, chum, you will now take the 'ole bucketful. Five years, you."

He regarded me artfully over his glasses and sniffed.

"So down goes Mr. Lahdidah Stevenson, and no appeal

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neither. 'Thank you, my Lord. I 'ave no comment to make what would get through your thick skull,' he says, very sarcastic, and off down the steps 'e goes, lost to the world as you might say, until out 'e comes, seven sharp this morning, which is in five minutes' time."

"Exactly," responded Mr. Maxton, and spat lightly on the chained teaspoon he was polishing. "Give us five minutes more, Mrs. Moore, that's what I say."

"And not such a fool, neither," continued the oracle, sucking a distant tooth with thoughtful efficiency. "Most of 'is lot—'mere pawns in the underworld's battle for honest blokes' lolly'" (he was quoting again) "they come unstuck they did. A year here, six months there. A proper set of Charleys. Not but what one or two of 'em might turn up to say welcome 'ome, eh, Bert?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said the proprietor. "What do you think, Mr. C.?"

I did not answer because that was precisely what I thought, and so did my editor or he would not have sent me on this mission. Mr. Anthony Augustus Fitzroy Stevenson had brought off a remarkable Hatton Garden burglary, capturing a hoard of uncut diamonds which had never been recovered. Mr. Stevenson had certainly protected his associates and underlings, but it was he who held the booty, or so the prosecution maintained. My editor, who has a very fair nose for the coming event, took the view that there might be immediate repercussions once Mr. Stevenson was a free man. My job was to get his story and watch for developments. My hope was to whirl my man away with the minimum of fuss, once I had made contact.

"Oi, oi!" said the little man suddenly. "What did I tell yer? Look who's 'ere. Give us another coffee, Bert, will yer, before the 'ouse blows up."

He had been peering through a tear in the flapping side-canvas of the stall, and he now shrank with his fresh cup into the one warm corner. Here he sucked audibly at the strange beverage which Mr. Maxton calls tea or coffee according to demand.

A couple of bulky young thugs appeared round the awning simultaneously. They might well have been wearing a uniform, for each had a black imitation-leather jacket, tight trousers, and all the regalia of insolence and menace. After them came a man with his hat pulled well down over his face, so that below his dark glasses nothing appeared except a white rodent nose which looked as if it were prehensile.

They occupied the coffee stall, using it as a cover without

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acknowledgment to the proprietor and without making a purchase. For a minute the silence was only broken by a slowly rippling sniff from the little man. A clock struck, and a second echoed it, and a couple of far-off works' hooters sounded a drones' tocsin. Then the little door up the road opened and a shabby man came out, looked up and down the road, and settled for the easier slope towards us.

"That's him," said the first young thug. "Must be."

"T'ain't," said the second. "I'd know him a mile off."

"Hold him," said Dark Glasses. "He'll know if there's any more coming."

The two young men sidled into the drizzle almost as if they were performing a dance. The shabby man found one on each side of him before he knew what was happening. He was still protesting querulously as they reached the shelter.

"Now what's all this? Just you let me go. I've seen enough trouble already. I know my rights . . . I . . ."

"Shut up," said Dark Glasses. "Just answer our questions, friendly like . . . see. Where's this guy Stevenson who's coming out this morning? Just behind you, eh? Still saying ta-ta to the screws?"

"I really don't know," said the shabby man. "I saw him this morning at breakfast. He wasn't in my block but I saw him, I think." He was free of their grip now and rubbing his left arm resentfully. "They don't let us out all in a batch, just one at a time. I don't know if he's out yet—and I don't care, neither. I'm on my way." But the trio had lost interest.

A new figure had emerged from the wall, a short fat man with greasy clothes who carried a shoddy cardboard suitcase.

"That's Harry Sims—Harry the Dip," said Dark Glasses. "He'll know. Ask him in, boys. Here—" he addressed himself to the proprietor—"give us four coffees and a packet of twenty."

The fat man joined them without persuasion, grinning all over his face. "Well, well, well!" he said. "Just look who's here! Welcome home on behalf of the Mayor and Corporation. Give us the illuminated address and the solid silver mug. Thanking you one and all for your kind attention. Now I was just wondering if I should see you lot." He drank noisily at his coffee and drew hard on a cigarette.

"I said to myself I said," he continued, "Harry boy, they'll be waiting just down the road—"

"Cut it," said Dark Glasses. "Where is he?"

"Gone," said the fat man. "Early, he went, I expect, and just on account of you lot, I'd say. I'm the last—I know that. Half an hour extra and nothing for overtime, that's the way

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they treat you today. I'm writing to *The Times* about it, I . . ."

There was a moment of delayed reaction when each man seemed to be looking for something to hit or to kick.

Then the two young men began to swear repetitiously and in unison as if they were repeating some serious but obscene litany.

" He can't have," said Dark Glasses finally. " He bloody can't have. We've been here since a quarter past and only that snivelling little bastard and Harry here have come out. He's still inside."

" 'Ave it your own way," said Harry. " I see Milord Lahdidah at breakfast and that was the last I seen of him. He had the full treatment according to regulations, same like we all do. He must have been in front of me because I know I was the last. A full bleeding half hour I was, standing in a corridor like a public lavatory waiting for the last blessing, and me a free man, according to law . . ."

No one in particular was listening to him. The old man in the corner gave a long coruscating sniff, a brief summing up of the weather, the company, and the situation. He wiped his nose and his moustache reflectively with his fingers.

" I'm off, Bert," he said. " See you Thursday. 'Ere, gimme my sandwiches."

Mr. Maxton Jnr. sighed and rummaged beneath his counter.

" See you Thursday," he said. " Two 'am, one corned, with mustard. So long."

The old man collected his greasy little parcel and moved off. I waited a couple of minutes, but something told me, even better than the muffled conference which was going on in the far corner, that the morning was over. Mr. Fitzroy Stevenson had evaded me and his erstwhile associates, and my best plan was to return to the office and explore other lines of communication.

I walked fairly briskly down the road, for the weather did not incite delay and the taxis had not come on duty. Ahead of me the old man shuffled at an even pace and it crossed my mind to catch up with him. It was possible, I thought, that he knew more than I: perhaps he had seen an early departure.

At the second corner he turned right and I quickened my pace to catch him, but as I rounded the bend by the newsagent it seemed that he had disappeared. A hundred yards ahead of me the only occupant of the street was striding along almost out of sight. Yet he had the same trench coat, the same cap—but now he appeared a foot taller, with a confident stride and a tough military look about his shoulders.

I had to run to catch him, to grab him by the arm and to make

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him pause. The man who faced me had a fierce, almost bogus army moustache jutting sharply upwards, and a bright informed suspicious eye. The steel-rimmed glasses had disappeared.

"Mr. Fitzroy Stevenson," I said. "I'm from the *Record*. Could you spare me a moment? We have a proposition to make you."

He looked me up and down, a friendly man-to-man glance which was at once amiable and understanding but unyielding.

"Good for you," he said. "You rumbled me. Do you mind if we walk along?"

I had no choice, for he took my arm and we marched together in step whether I liked it or not.

"I'd only got five minutes, you know, before my ex-colleagues arrived. They can be very tricky boys to deal with and I had to use all the charm in the world to get the governor to open up before time. But I had to hang around to see what the form was. I hope you follow me, my dear chap?"

"I'm from the *Record*," I repeated, breathlessly. "We want to make you an offer for your memoirs. Now, there's no difficulty about this. We have a re-write man, and we could probably pay you . . ." I went into my routine story, but my companion was not really listening. We strode along into the main street like an avalanche, sweeping early workers and late cleaners out of our path like windblown rubbish.

"Sorry, old boy," he said. "Nothing doing—nothing at all. Repentant fellow, going straight, catching a train to Scotland or Amsterdam or Cardiff or Pernambuco—make it wherever you like. Now this, I think, is where I pick up transport. If you're going back to Bert's, give the boys my best wishes, won't you?"

He was one of those masterful types who can conjure a taxi out of the air. He was gone before I could even mumble a civil good-bye.

I stood there in the drizzle faced by dozens of buses going in the wrong direction, and obstructing honest pedestrians proceeding uncomfortably on their lawful occasions.

It was only when I pulled myself together, compounded a plausible story for my editor, and at long last found an unwilling taxi, that it occurred to me to speculate idly on the contents of that packet of sandwiches which Bert had ready under the counter. Now I come to think of it, they seemed as if they had been in captivity for a long long time.

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Notice in cafeteria: Courteous and efficient self-service.

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MERCHANT OF DREAMS

BY JOHN SALT

IN EARLIER TIMES the quartermasters of sailing ships would put the helm hard over and head for blue water rather than listen long to the singing that came from among the palm groves of the Pointe aux Sirènes. But this strange music, whether caused by the wind among the skeletal fronds or, as the indigenes would have it, by the ghostly voices of a million slaves whose bones now whitened with the coral, rarely troubled such hardened seafarers as Bernard O'Mara. He listened to it, his peaked cap thrust back from a wild mop of red hair, as his auxiliary schooner *Kestrel* coasted along the moonlit north shore of Pierron des Isles towards the port of Havredieu.

The Pointe aux Sirènes was abeam when O'Mara saw the waving light and the patch of white that danced around it. He rang the Diesels down to stop. Ching, the supercargo, joined him on the bridge, and in a moment the shockhead of the Cayman islander, Louis Toussaint, emerged from the engine-room hatch. The three men stared at the dancing light, then O'Mara gave the wheel a turn, nosing *Kestrel* towards the shore. Toussaint said with a perceptible quaver, " Best we keep off, man, it could be a duppy."

O'Mara grinned at him. " This duppy talks," he said. " You can hear it, can't you, Ching? "

The Chinese boy wagged his head. " It's a girl duppy," he observed sagely.

" They's often the worst," Toussaint mourned. " Will I put up the revs again, boss? "

O'Mara shook his head. " You'll give her a touch astern, Louis, then Ching here will drop the hook and we'll lay to." He put head and shoulders through the wheelhouse door and called below, " I'm going ashore, Kenny, there's a girl calling

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for help on the point. Away up and lend me a hand with the dinghy."

A voice grumbled and a thin, fairhaired youth came up on deck. "Where's the fire, Barney? I'd just got my head down." He peered at the shoreline. "Who's that flashing?"

"That's what we're going to find out. Lively now, the hook's down and she'll swing with the ebb."

"Why not give 'em a hail?" the boy protested. "No sense sculling across that lot for nothing." He cocked an ear to the singing among the trees and shivered suddenly.

O'Mara gave him a goodnatured shove and scrambled down after him into the rocking dinghy. The light rushed forward as the small boat grounded. A white figure hung over the boat, one arm aloft, holding a hurricane lamp. A distraught voice cried, "Quickly, come up to the house."

O'Mara hurried up shallow steps in the coral while Kenny secured the dinghy. The girl flitted ahead, her lamp swaying violently. Light streamed from an open door and she darted through. O'Mara followed more slowly, glancing around him at evidence of wealth. They passed through a vast and echoing kitchen with a stone-flagged floor, then along a wide, deeply-carpeted corridor. Afro-Cuban music boomed through the house like a frenetic heartbeat hammering at the nerves. Another door stood open at the end of the passage and the girl halted there. O'Mara stepped past her and entered the room.

A man in a soft white shirt and dress trousers lay on a sheepskin rug before a crackling wood fire. His face was peaceful and he seemed to be sleeping. O'Mara knelt and slipped a hand inside the shirt. After a moment he stood up, crossed to the wall, and turned off the record player.

In the sudden dead silence he turned and looked at the girl. She had come a few steps into the room and stood there watching him, her eyes alert and too bright. O'Mara said gently, "I am afraid he is dead."

Kenny came in then; he took one look at the dead man, then turned wide eyes on O'Mara. The Irishman nodded, then said to the girl, "You know Kenny Paulin, of course?"

She nodded silently.

Kenny spoke in a subdued voice. "I'm sorry about this, Janice; what happened?"

She turned to answer him, then swayed forward. O'Mara took her arm and guided her to a deep chair. She sat down, rocking herself gently back and forth, not looking at the dead man. O'Mara took the lantern from her, turned down the wick, and blew out the flame, giving her time.

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" My father," she said dully. " It happened about an hour ago, maybe longer. I tried the phone but it didn't seem to work. The servants are away for the night so I went down to the shore looking for help. When I saw your lights I went back for the lantern."

O'Mara nodded. " Where is the telephone? "

" Next door, in Daddy's study."

" Perhaps you would like to try it again. Kenny and I will see to what has to be done in here. His room is upstairs? "

She nodded gratefully and went out.

The two men carried the body up to the master bedroom. O'Mara sent Kenny back to the kitchen to make strong coffee and bent again over the bed. The man was elderly and emaciated. Marked cyanosis of the face and lips betrayed a heart condition, but there was a peculiarity about the eyes that caused O'Mara to draw in his breath sharply. He unbuttoned one of the dead man's shirtsleeves and rolled it to the elbow. His investigation lasted only a few seconds, and at the end of it he rolled down the sleeve, and drew a coverlet over the body.

The girl was drinking coffee with Kenny Paulin when he returned to the lounge. Her eyes met his with a swift question, but O'Mara turned his head away and poured himself coffee. Then he sat down facing her. " You feel better now? "

" Yes, thank you."

She spoke in a husky, attractive voice; and O'Mara, observing her closely for the first time, registered her beauty with a strange sense of shock. Her fair hair, hanging loosely now about her shoulders, had the sheen and translucent quality of the inner lining of certain deep-sea shells and something of the same patina lay on the milky pallor of her skin. Faint colour was returning to her face, but this merely accentuated the darkness around her eyes. O'Mara could see that their colour was violet but shadowed now by a drowsiness induced by shock.

He said, " The name's O'Mara. I own the schooner out there."

She said vaguely, " I'm sorry, I am being rude. My name is Janice Trudell."

O'Mara said with interest, " Then your father was the novelist, Ralph Trudell? I heard he'd bought up this old place."

" That's right. The house was derelict when we came, but the agent told us that a pirate once lived here. Daddy meant to write his story one day."

" Only he never did," O'Mara said quietly.

She looked at him miserably, and was about to speak when O'Mara said to his friend, " Hop out and brew up a fresh pot, Kenny."

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When the boy had gone out Janice said bitterly, "You needn't have sent him away; he knows the story. I suppose you do too by now."

O'Mara nodded soberly. "I found the needle-marks. Where did he get the stuff?"

"I don't know. It comes into the island. A few people like Daddy used it. I did think once—"

"Go on, what did you think?"

"It doesn't matter."

"As you wish. But the stuff has to be manufactured and it comes expensive. I don't know how you'd cover up a thing like that in Pierron."

"Money helps," she said bitterly. "Daddy made a lot when he was young. Money buys almost anything, doesn't it? But all it bought him was death." She slumped in the chair, her shoulders shaking.

O'Mara patted her arm.

"You'll find it was a heart attack," he said. "Did you manage to raise a doctor?"

"Yes. He can't come till morning though. We're cut off from the mainland at high tide."

"I know; that's why I think Kenny should stay the night here. I'll come up to see you myself tomorrow. I can't leave the ship where she is, in case we get a blow. Think you'll be all right?"

She blinked at him tearfully. "You've been a great help, Mr. O'Mara. But Kenny doesn't have to stay, you know."

Something in her tone made O'Mara say sharply, "Maybe Kenny blotted his copybook once or twice in Pierron, but there's no real harm in him."

She smiled at him wearily. "If you say so, Mr. O'Mara."

"I do say so. I'll have a word with him now, then I'll be off."

Kenny received the suggestion truculently.

"We can't leave the girl here by herself," O'Mara pointed out.

"Agreed. Let Toussaint or Ching do a spot of night duty."

"No sense in rowing back and forth like a bunch of bumboat men."

"Janice and I don't hit it off."

"It's not exactly a social visit, sport. Anyway, you hardly endeared yourself to anybody in Pierron and it's never worried you till now. What the hell do you care whether you reach Havredieu tonight or a few hours later? Stop crabbing, Kenny; you're here and you'll stay."

"Who says so?"

O'Mara took a deep breath. "I say so, Kenny; and what I say usually goes, if I say it firmly enough. You shipped with me as

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crew and you've worked your turn, I'll say that for you. Don't spoil the record now."

Paulin's face was white. "It's the last time I ship aboard anything you skipper," he said viciously.

O'Mara said equably, "You were glad enough at the time, Kenny. Now start seeing straight; there's no point in fighting me."

"I could buy and sell you, O'Mara."

"I know it, sport, but you wouldn't. Your trouble is that you carry too full a head of steam and you haven't learnt about safety valves yet."

Paulin relaxed suddenly. "O.K., Barney; have it your way," he said with a grin.

O'Mara left him rather thoughtfully and walked back to the dinghy. The singing among the trees had died with the wind but a light rain was falling. Back aboard *Kestrel*, he found that his sandals and trouser turn-ups were streaked with a reddish substance resembling paint. He showed it to Ching.

The Chinese boy nodded. "It is a clay found only near the Pointe aux Sirènes. The dancers come for it at carnival time to daub their faces and bodies. It will wash off the skin but cannot be removed from clothing."

O'Mara tied up in Havredieu soon after midnight, and was awakened at first light by the crash of chain derricks loading bauxite into a freighter lying in the bay. He had shaved and was at breakfast when the police lieutenant Duluche came aboard with two constables. O'Mara greeted him with the familiarity of long acquaintance and pushed the coffee pot and a cup towards him.

Duluche ignored them; his thin, austerely sculptured face looked bleak. "What are you carrying, O'Mara?"

The sailor shrugged. "Fertiliser, a machine drill, assorted oddments: the usual."

"That's all?"

O'Mara looked at him curiously. "What else?"

"We shall see." The policeman put his head outside the cabin and barked a sharp order.

O'Mara scowled. "What is this, Etienne?"

"In a moment we shall talk. Till then be silent."

O'Mara glared, and was about to reply in kind when one of Duluche's men returned holding a flat package done up in plastic film with attachments of adhesive tape. Duluche snatched it and snapped, "Where?"

"Taped to the underside of an engine-room bilge-plate."

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" Go, continue the search, there may be more."

O'Mara reached a hand out to the package. Duluche said grimly, " Open it then."

The wrappings peeled away to reveal a flat tin box. O'Mara flipped open the lid and stared inside. His jaw dropped.

Duluche said stonily, " This would have made you a rich man."

O'Mara looked up.

" Etienne," he said, " I don't carry this stuff. You know me better than that."

" I know you, yet I do not know you. You sail into our harbour as a friend, you have been here many times before. But this time you bring cocaine. How often before, O'Mara? "

O'Mara closed the box and sat down heavily. " Never, Etienne. You have to take my word for it that I've no idea how it came aboard."

Duluche continued to stare at him. " You will admit that is not easy to believe, O'Mara. But if it were so, what of your crew, Toussaint, Paulin, or the Chinese, Ah Ching? "

" Not a chance. I tell you this stuff has been planted. Anyway, why should I be such a fool as to ship into Havredieu and risk a customs search? Why not a quick landing somewhere else? "

" There is a coastal patrol," Duluche reminded him.

" It was sleeping last night when I landed on Pointe aux Sirènes."

The policeman's steady gaze flickered. " You can prove this? "

" I put Kenny Paulin ashore to look after the Trudell girl when her father dropped dead."

" And Paulin was happy to do this? "

" Well, since you ask, he objected pretty strongly."

" Now that interests me."

" I don't see why it should."

Duluche slapped his holster dramatically. " It is time to drop the mask," he declared. " I have been told of your landing last night, and the facts are confirmed by Miss Trudell. But there is something else that you do not know. Her father's study was ransacked last night, certain papers were taken."

" But what about Kenny? " O'Mara broke in.

" Of Monsieur Paulin there is no sign, my friend."

O'Mara said disgustedly, " Let's have it all, Etienne. I can't explain the dream dust, and at this stage I'm not even going to try. You just tell your side of it and try to stop acting like the Public Prosecutor."

" Very well. I'll have some coffee now."

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" It's cold as river mud and I hope it chokes you," O'Mara said uncharitably. " Let's hear from you."

" As you wish. Well then, narcotics are coming into Pierron. Addiction is on the increase, for this thing is like a white weed that grows in darkness and corrupts whom it touches. It corrupted Trudell, for example. You would have discovered that? "

O'Mara nodded silently.

" It follows that there must be a receiver and distributor. Someone who knows the island and its people very well. A man who can pull strings where necessary, who can cover his tracks when authority becomes inquisitive."

O'Mara said incredulously, " You mean there is a merchant of dreams in Pierron? "

" Marchand des cauchemars," Duluche said viciously. " Do you need me to tell you that this thing is death? "

" Why search *Kestrel*? "

" We arrested a taker on a vagrancy charge. For three days he had no drugs, it was not pleasant. Very soon he told us all he knew. Alas, it was not much. Simply that a small ship would bring in the next consignment. For three weeks we have searched every schooner and launch that put into Havredieu. It was done discreetly; nobody knew. And in the finish, O'Mara, it was you who brought it."

" This vagrant, where is he now? "

" In the cemetery, my friend. He died of poison given him in prison food. You see how efficient our man must be, how quickly he must have worked, for example, at Pointe aux Sirènes last night."

" How could he have known of Trudell's death so soon? "

" Tout simplement," Duluche answered.

" The island is one big party-line, and those who do not listen in would receive the news as swiftly from gabbling telephone operators. Our man would have his spies.

" But in this case he would have no need of such aids. Surely he was on the spot."

" Meaning Kenny Paulin? "

" Ca se voit! Consider his position. In the same house with a dead man to whom he had sold drugs, a man perhaps who wrote indiscreetly—after all, he was a writer by trade. What more natural than to search the desk and to run? "

" You're wrong about Paulin," O'Mara said stubbornly.

" The facts fit, O'Mara. Paulin comes of an old island family, he has money, he is unstable, he has opportunity, and his own wildness provides the motive."

O'Mara growled, " The kid has more money than sense. I'll

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admit I took him to sea to sweat the booze out of him. I tell you it's been the making of him."

Duluche said quietly, "You took him to sea to keep him out of my hands, O'Mara. This in itself provides grounds for suspicion against you. I would remind you that a serious charge is pending against Monsieur Paulin. One does not expect the heir to a fortune to commit a robbery with violence."

"It was never proved."

"You did not give me the opportunity."

"That's as may be. But he came back to Pierron."

"So he did, and I shall find him, O'Mara; make no doubt of that."

"What will you do now?"

"A number of things which shall remain secret. But there is one thing that you must do which you will not like."

"What does that mean?"

"That you must work your passage. I do not find it easy to believe you a trafficker, but the doubt remains. I cannot watch your ship as closely as I would like, my men are too well known. An attempt will be made to recover this package which, incidentally, I shall replace in your engine-room. It will be for you to make your plans and to keep me informed if Paulin tries to contact you. My advice is to do what you would normally do on Pierron. You will want to see the girl again. Do so. Dine with your friends as usual. But do not leave the ship unguarded. No report will be made of this; to anyone watching the ship now this will appear a friendly call. You are to say nothing of what has passed between us. Understood?"

O'Mara put out a hand. "This means plenty to you, Etienne?"

Duluche looked down at the hand and looked away again. "May you never feel as much," the lieutenant told him simply, and went ashore.

O'Mara was an astute and reasonably careful man, but the anger now building steadily inside him had induced a cold and dangerous mood. He kicked the cabin door wide and bellowed for Ah Ching.

"I think somebody may make an attempt on the ship," he said without preamble. "You are promoted to guard." He unlocked a drawer and pulled out a pistol. "Here, take this."

The Chinese boy took the gun gingerly. "I am to use this?"

"You share it with Toussaint; when you're asleep, he has it. How's your head for liquor?"

"I am Band of Hope, total abstainer," Ah Ching said virtuously.

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O'Mara's lips twitched. "From now on you're going to be the biggest soak on Pierron des Isles," he announced. "But only to outward appearance. Get it?"

Ah Ching grinned. "I look drunk but not to be drunk?"

"Right in one. Your job is to watch. By and by somebody comes pussyfooting along to search the ship. Let him do it, let him take away whatever he has a fancy to. Then follow him, not too close. Soon as you've seen him to ground, get in touch with Duluche, then come looking for me. The same goes for Toussaint. And I'll be taking a watch myself. How much did you two hear this morning?"

Ah Ching lowered his lashes. "Enough," he said simply.

"Right, forget it all for a start. You heard nothing; you know nothing."

"Sure, boss. Mr. Paulin, he come back soon?"

O'Mara shook his head. "He didn't say."

Ah Ching giggled.

"We miss him, boss. Mr. Paulin have a funny way with him. Make us laugh."

"Yes," O'Mara said warily. "He was quite a joker. Get back to the cargo now, Ah Ching. I'll see Louis Toussaint later."

O'Mara picked up a hire car in Havredieu and drove out to Pointe aux Sirènes. The tide was low and the concrete causeway joining the point to the mainland sparkled with salt crystals in the morning sun. A white-jacketed manservant took him to the patio at the back of the house.

Janice stood up from a long wicker chair. She wore a yellow suntop and sea-blue shorts, her feet were bare. A darkness beneath the eyes betrayed the tension of the previous night, but she smiled at him steadily.

"You heard about Kenny?"

O'Mara hesitated. "Duluche told me this morning. You didn't see the going of him?"

"I didn't hear a thing till morning. Why would he do a thing like that, Mr. O'Mara?"

"Call me Barney. I wouldn't know."

"People are pretty used to Kenny doing wild things." She stopped, then said impulsively, "I know this is dreadful of me, but do you think he could have had anything to do with, with—"

"Your father's illness? Why should you think that?"

She said defensively, "It's not a new thought, Barney; I wondered once before."

"Better tell me then."

"It happened last year. Kenny was up here all the time. We

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swam and played around together, but it wasn't really me he came to see."

"I find that hard to believe."

"I mean it. The attraction was Daddy; they spent hours together in his study. Then suddenly it ended. I hadn't seen him for months when he turned up here last night. And he didn't want to stay, did he?"

"Did he tell you that?"

"No, I heard you talking."

"I think you had better say what's on your mind."

She gestured helplessly. "I don't really know, Barney. It's simply that it was such an odd friendship. Daddy was an intellectual, happy with his books, and Kenny—well, you know Kenny."

"I thought I did, certainly."

"When he came here, Daddy was always at his best, talking about the next book he was going to write, coming out with mad ideas that made us all laugh. Then when Kenny went, he would sink back into a sort of daze and finally wander off to his room. He would have his meals sent up—what little he ate—and sometimes I wouldn't see him for days."

"You think Kenny brought him drugs?"

"I'm almost sure of it, Barney."

O'Mara fell silent a moment, thinking about Duluche. Finally he said, "It's a small island; they'll find him soon enough, then we'll know."

Janice said in a small voice, "Supposing it was you who found him, Barney. What would you do?"

"In my present mood I'd probably break his neck," O'Mara answered her honestly. "Look, Janice, I've had a bright idea. Do you know Marcel Frazier?"

"Quite well, yes."

"He's a good friend of mine. I usually bunk with him when I'm in Havredieu, and I'm due up there for dinner tonight. Come with me."

"It would be nice."

"Sure it would, take your mind off things. Can I use your phone?"

"You know where it is."

As O'Mara waited for the operator to connect him, he began thinking of Frazier's pleasant hacienda-type house set behind a screen of bougainvillaea on the saddleback road overlooking Grand Pierre. He had known Marcel a long time and owed him plenty, including a half-share in *Kestrel*. His friend's voice, deep and authoritative, broke into his thoughts. O'Mara leaned

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forward and spoke eagerly. The thing was settled in a few moments, and he went back to tell Janice . . .

O'Mara spent the rest of the day off-loading cargo. At sundown he showered and shaved again, then drove back along the corniche to collect Janice. The palms crowded close along the road and sang to them as O'Mara headed the car towards Grand Pierre. The girl shivered suddenly.

" Does it bother you, the singing? "

" Not before, but tonight somehow it frightens me."

O'Mara squeezed her hand. " It's only another night, nothing special about it. Don't be sad."

Frazier received them at the door, his lean, hard body immaculate in white dinner-jacket and black lightweight evening trousers. He shook hands gravely with Janice, then punched O'Mara on the shoulder. " How's the boy, Barney? "

O'Mara looked him over appreciatively. " That's a nice piece of cloth on your back, Marcel. Still dealing at the same slop shop? "

" Haven't found a better one so far, sport."

" You must be the only man in Havredieu who shops in London by telephone."

Frazier grinned at Janice, his eyes dancing. " The Irish are given to discussing intimacies out loud," he said. " You'll have to forgive Barney. He's a sort of licensed buffoon."

She smiled uncertainly, and Frazier led her into the dining-room, still chattering over his shoulder to O'Mara.

After dinner O'Mara sat back in comfort with a drink and left the other two to do the talking. For probably the first time in his life he was beginning to weigh the advantages of a fancy-free and footloose existence against those of a firm lodgment on dry ground. Frazier, he knew, had holdings in Maracaibo oil, Jamaican sugar, and Canadian shipping, and beside that he had his own chain of private trading interests. He had once offered O'Mara a partnership, and so far as the sailor knew, the offer was still open.

At ten o'clock he glanced at his watch; Toussaint would soon be taking over from Ah Ching, it was time to go. He said so to Frazier. His friend protested, it was far too early to break up a pleasant party.

" Sorry, sport, I'm a dedicated working man helping you to make your fortune. Don't you want the money? "

" Well, if you put it like that. But you'll stay, won't you, Janice? It is raining hard now, I could drive you home later."

She shook her head. " I would rather go with Barney, if you don't mind. I have things to do. You see, tomorrow—"

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"Of course, your father. That was stupid of me. But you'll get wet without a raincoat. Come and help me find one, Barney."

He led the way to a cloakroom off the main hall, pushed the door open, and clicked on the light. "In there, Barney; help yourself." He leaned in the doorway and lit a cigarette.

O'Mara reached a coat down, then glanced at his friend. "You're going to say something."

Frazier nodded. "I heard about Kenny Paulin," he said quietly.

"The devil you did. Who told you?"

"Duluche is a pal of mine; anyway the whole island will know by now. What I want to know is, how do you stand with Duluche?"

"Solid, I should say. I expect to be in gaol by morning."

Frazier narrowed his eyes and fingered ash from his cigarette. He said, too casually, "Did you ship in that snow, Barney?"

"You are asking for a busted skull, Marcel."

"Just for the record, Barney. One has to ask these things. But to comfort your wounded feelings, I'll admit I never believed that you did."

"Nice of you."

"Which leaves us Kenny Paulin."

"I have my own opinions on that."

"No doubt, but you had better hear mine as well. Look, Barney, I've never questioned the way you run your—should I say our—business. You're rough and you're tough when you have to be, but you're a bit of a sucker as well. Paulin played you for one. It's time you woke up to the fact that the boy is just a thug with too much money. He has no social conscience, sport. He plays life for kicks, and you'll be the one to collect them if you don't watch out."

O'Mara draped the raincoat over his arm. "I guess you're right at that, Marcel."

"You can take bets on it," Frazier said grimly. "I don't think Etienne is going to pull you in, but we shall all breathe a little easier when they pick Kenny up. He may have skipped the island, of course."

O'Mara said bleakly, "I'll find him, Marcel. I have a nose for that kind of rat."

Frazier clapped him on the shoulder. "One last thing, Barney: I'd like you to feel you can rely on me if it really comes on to blow. Now let's get back to Janice."

O'Mara splashed out to the car, and Janice scrambled in a moment later with the light raincoat thrown over her shoulders.

The headlamps swept a wide arc and illuminated Frazier

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waving to them from the verandah. The rain beat at the windscreen in a solid white wall of water and O'Mara drove slowly, hugging the shoulder of the narrow forest road. Janice lit a cigarette for him and stuck it in his mouth. He jerked his head in acknowledgment, then said thoughtfully, "There's a lot to be said for home cooking; Marcel leads a sweet life."

She smiled. "But you'd settle for coffee and beans on that ship of yours. You can't fool me, O'Mara."

"I don't know. It could be I'm slowing down."

"You're still worried about Kenny Paulin, aren't you?"

O'Mara tramped on the accelerator and sent the little car bouncing forward. "Not worried," he told her savagely, "just flaming mad. Tell me, Janice, are you one of the few people on Pierron that doesn't know I'm supposed to have brought in a package of cocaine on my ship?"

Her voice took on a dangerous edge. "And did you, O'Mara?"

"Hear the story, then tell me."

She listened in silence, then said quietly, "It was Kenny Paulin, Barney."

"I know it. You don't suppose it makes me feel any happier. I liked the kid."

She screamed suddenly, "Look out, Barney, there's something in the road."

He stamped on the brake pedal and swung the wheel. The car skidded and fetched up against an earth bank on the far side of the road. Janice freed her door and the two of them clambered out on her side. O'Mara knelt beside a bundle on the road. "There's a torch in the car," he told the girl. She fetched it and swung the beam downwards on the pale face of Ah Ching. O'Mara felt the boy's head gingerly. "Coshed and left for the next car to run over him," he said bitterly.

"There's a car coming," Janice cried. She stepped into the middle of the road and signalled with the torch. A black saloon pulled up a few feet away and Duluche got out, followed by two uniformed policemen and Louis Toussaint. The lieutenant knelt a moment beside Ah Ching, then barked at O'Mara, "You were at Frazier's?"

The sailor nodded. "Do you know anything about this?"

Toussaint said quickly, "Like you said, boss. A fellow comes nosing aboard the ship. Me and Ching watched him go down to the engine-room and come up again with a package under his arm. He's got a car alongside, so Ching slips under a rug in the back. Soon as the car takes off, I grab myself the first copper I see."

"We were slow off the mark to begin with," Duluche struck

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in. " But all the roads out of Havredieu were being watched. We had a call from a patrol on the road to Grand Pierre and followed immediately."

" But not immediately enough," O'Mara said nastily. " Where do we go from here? "

Duluche shrugged. " I suggest you put your man in the back of the car and take him to the ship. We shall follow."

O'Mara snarled at him, " Is that the best you can think of? "

" The tide is against us," Duluche said simply. " It will be better to do as I say."

" But for God's sake, man, there was enough cocaine in that packet to kill half the island."

" Enough talc perhaps to dust a fair-sized baby. I should make it plain to you that the package was a substitute." O'Mara saw that the policeman's lips were twisted in an angry grin. He turned away from him and he and Janice helped Toussaint load the unconscious Chinese boy into the back of the car.

Kestrel lay silent alongside the quay, but lights blazed from her forward cabin. Toussaint pulled at his lip, then leapt aboard. He put a head inside the cabin, then shouted to O'Mara, " Come quick, boss. Mr. Paulin here."

O'Mara charged after him.

Paulin sat at the table, his head and shoulders slumped forward across it. A dirty grey raincoat was draped over him, its mudstained hem lapping in folds along the floor. O'Mara gripped him fiercely and pushed him back against the padded bulkhead. Paulin's head rolled slowly round. He tried to grin, and they heard him whisper, " Glory be, back among the Christians."

Duluche pushed past O'Mara. " Get him a drink," he ordered. " Not spirits, something hot, he has a head injury."

Paulin put a hand to his head and dabbed vaguely at a matted wound in his scalp. " That's where the blighter got me," he managed.

Duluche pulled Paulin's hand away from his head, turned it over, and examined the palm closely, then did the same for the other.

" What are you looking for? " O'Mara asked suspiciously.

" Nothing that I find," Duluche said shortly, then addressed himself to Paulin. " Do you remember what happened to you? You were hit, you say? "

The boy's eyes clouded with the effort of memory. " I walked, I walked a long way." He paused. " But before that I was in a dark place, I don't know where." His face brightened.

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" That's where I walked from, must have been."

Toussaint pushed a mug of hot sweet tea into Paulin's hands. He drank eagerly. Duluche went on probing. " This dark place—a shed, a cellar, some place of that kind? "

Paulin looked at his wrists, they were burn-marked by cords. He nodded his head and winced. " I was tied, I remember that. And it was in some sort of outhouse—in the woods it must have been, I remember stumbling into trees."

" You saw nobody? You don't know how you got here? "

Paulin blinked. " I'm not even sure where I am now," he said wearily.

" He'll go out like a light in a moment," O'Mara warned.

" We have to find where they kept him," Duluche said impatiently.

O'Mara said suddenly, " That coat, Kenny. You weren't wearing one last night. Where did you get it? "

Paulin looked at him glassily. " Last night? Tonight, you mean. Found it, I suppose, in the shed." He slumped forward, but Toussaint caught him and lowered his head gently on the settle, then went round and put the boy's feet up.

O'Mara knelt and rubbed at the hem of the raincoat. " Red mud," he muttered, " and it won't come off. That means it was picked up at Pointe aux Sirènes." He said to Janice, " Slip your coat off, I want to look at it."

He turned the coat inside out and looked at the maker's name stitched to the check lining under the collar, then leaned across the unconscious Paulin and pulled the collar of his coat back. Duluche's eyes glinted; he snapped at O'Mara, " The same? "

O'Mara nodded. " Gleddon, Covent Garden."

" Then why do we wait? Toussaint can look after Paulin and Ah Ching until the ambulance arrives."

Janice said bewilderedly, " I don't understand; what are you going to do? Because whatever it is, don't imagine you can leave me out of it."

" We're going back to Grand Pierre and I don't want you along."

" That's too bad, because I'm coming just the same. I have a special interest in this, remember."

O'Mara hesitated for only a second. " All right, but you stay in the car, things might get unpleasant."

They approached by a sideroad, the two cars lurching and bumping along a rutted, muddy lane that brought them out on the concrete alongside the darkened house. A mud-spattered Chevrolet already stood there. Duluche glanced at it and nodded to O'Mara. " It is the same; we have come to the right address."

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O'Mara took the verandah steps in a single bound. The front door stood open and the party hurried inside. O'Mara searched the ground floor, Duluche and his men the top. They met again in the hall.

"He has cleared out," O'Mara growled.

"Evidently. Too much happened too swiftly. First Paulin escapes, then the agent returns from Havredieu with a box of harmless powder and the report of a chase. The birds have flown, but one asks oneself where to? The roads by now are blocked."

"He keeps a boat near my house," Janice said suddenly. "There is a path down the cliff behind here. It leads to the coast opposite Grand Pierre. From there it is only half a mile along the beach to Pointe aux Sirènes."

Duluche shrugged. "A path for goats but not for booted policemen on a night of storm. We will take the coast road."

"You'll lose an hour by doing that." She pulled out her torch. "I know the path; I'll lead you."

The gale that lashed the tops of the palm trees now drew from them a high keening sound like souls in torment. Janice plunged boldly in among the trees and O'Mara followed her, slipping and sinking in the mire. The ground sloped steeply down towards the boom of the surf, and the lights of the party ranging down the cliffside matched the few isolated chinks of brightness from the coastguard station on Grand Pierre across the wild water.

The path descended in tight spirals. O'Mara hung on to Janice's coat belt and wrenched with his free hand at the coarse ferns and grasses that sprouted from the cliff face to stay his own steps. They had been struggling steadily downwards for ten minutes when from far below came a long drawn-out scream followed by the faint clatter of falling boulders.

Duluche howled against the gale, "One less, but which one?"

O'Mara grunted and pulled the girl towards him. "I lead from now on," he told her.

"But you don't know the path," she wailed.

"Fine, then I'll be the first to break my neck. Let's move."

The roar of the sea was close when O'Mara lost his footing and finished the descent on his back, fetching up on a narrow strip of beach with the sharp spray of a receding comber lashing at his face. The party re-formed and set off along the beach towards Pointe aux Sirènes, progressing in a series of wild dashes from one patch of sand to the next between incoming breakers. The ground sloped upwards again and their feet grated on coral. O'Mara topped the rise overlooking the Pointe aux Sirènes. Green waves pounded the narrow causeway that led to the high

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ground on which the Trudell house stood. He shouted, "Where's the boathouse, Janice?"

The wind caught her words and hurled them at him. "Up there to the right, there's a rock cay that juts from the point."

O'Mara scrambled higher, then halted in awe. "Will you look at that sea? Frazier'd be mad to try it in a small boat."

"Mad or desperate," Duluche agreed. "Can you see anything?"

O'Mara peered the length of the cay. It jutted into the raging night like a great smooth whaleback, with long seas sweeping it from end to end. "Look, out there on the right, there's a light in the boathouse."

They all heard the roar of a high-powered marine engine. A moment later a white-painted launch sped out from the doubtful shelter of the promontory. Duluche cursed. "He has beaten us."

O'Mara's face was grey. "It isn't over; listen to that engine."

As he spoke the motor died and the stem of the launch dipped beneath a comber. The launch swung broadside to a breaker and was overwhelmed and crushed against the coral cay. The wave receded and the launch lay high and dry for a moment. Then a second breaker swept the craft from its lodgment and rolled it over and over towards the beach; smashing it with great hammer blows that caved in the cabin and wrenched it away.

O'Mara plunged to the water's edge to meet the incoming wreckage. The main section of the hull thundered down within feet of him and something black detached itself and floated seaward on the undertow.

O'Mara went in waist deep, then launched himself on the flood of an incoming wave. He was thrown up high for a moment and grabbed wildly for the floating bundle, locking both hands on the fabric of a jacket. The next wave hurled O'Mara and his burden back on the sand where Duluche and another policeman hauled him to safety.

He scrambled to his feet and walked to the black bundle on the beach. Duluche shone his torch beam down on the drowned white face of Marcel Frazier. O'Mara said miserably, "He'll not be telling us anything now."

"Do you need to be told anything?"

"It's hard to believe that a friend like Marcel could be the merchant of dreams you talked about. Maybe I'm glad I shall never know for certain."

"Take a look at his hands," Duluche advised him quietly. "You will find them stained with an indelible purple dye. The substitute packet was treated with it, proving he was the receiver.

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He was a frightened man, O'Mara. He had to get out, if only for a little time. We shall find other things at the house, be sure of that."

"I guess so," O'Mara mumbled. "Anyway, it's your worry now. I'll take you up to the house, Janice."

"It's high tide," she reminded him. "Take me back to the ship, Barney."

Duluche joined them there two hours later. He had been to the hospital to see Paulin and found him able to talk.

"What happened to him?" O'Mara asked.

"He was hit from behind in Trudell's study, but caught a glimpse of the intruder in a mirror. Frazier's man obviously thought he had been recognised and did the first thing that came into his head, which was to drag Paulin back with him. I don't know what they planned to do with him, but I think he would have ended in the sea with a weight at his feet. Fortunately for him, they didn't tie him up very expertly and he managed to struggle free. Even then, we'd have been little the wiser if you had not recognised the coat."

"Poor Kenny," Janice murmured. "But why did he object so much to staying at my place?"

Duluche looked uncomfortable. "It seems the young man has finer feelings than I gave him credit for, mademoiselle. He found out about your father's drug-taking, and Monsieur Trudell banned him from the house. He went away feeling that you suspected him of supplying your father. He did not feel equal to facing you that night."

"It's true. I did suspect him."

"Eh bien, voilà tout! We found the other one on the cliffs, O'Mara. His hands were stained like Frazier's."

"Dead?"

"A broken leg, some cracked ribs—he will survive. The point is that he talked. We shall have the whole ring, both here in Pierron and in Havana where the cocaine was smuggled aboard your ship."

"But why, Etienne, why on earth did he do it? He had enough already."

Duluche shook his head. "Not so, my friend. Many things had gone wrong for Marcel Frazier. He had made some unfortunate investments; but although his receipts declined, his appetites remained. He lived and thought as a rich man, he could not have lived otherwise. He trafficked in narcotics as a calculated risk in which the end justified the means." He put out a hand suddenly. "I insulted you this morning, O'Mara. Can we be friends now?"

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O'Mara grinned and took the outstretched hand. " So long as you don't tell anybody," he said. Duluche saluted Janice, wished them both good night, and left the cabin.

O'Mara settled back against the padded bulkhead with a grateful sigh. " Suddenly everybody likes me," he remarked. " What will you do now, Janice? "

" I've had enough of the singing palms I shall leave Pierron."

" It's a sad island," he admitted. " You'd like Barbados, though."

" Do you call there? "

" I'm due in Bridgetown in three days. Why not sail with me? "

" Would you like that? "

He pulled her gently towards him and spent a little time proving how much. Some time later she asked him quietly, " Have you ever considered settling down ashore, Barney? "

But O'Mara the uncommitted answered only, " It's a thought, Janice. It's quite a thought."

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SOLUTIONS to BEE-LINE
on page 14

1. " *Improve each shining hour.*"
2. *Jupiter.*
3. *The excretions of aphides.*
4. *Chinese temple.*
5. *Both are books by Maeterlinck.*
6. *Bach.*
7. *Plato.*
8. 300*; with a line above,* 3,000.
9. (*i*) *Brandy and soda;*
   (*ii*) *Blood, brains, brass, and brads* (*money*).

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD
on page 144

Across. 1, *Flea-circus.* 6, *Plug.* 10, *Freak.* 11, *Cold frame.* 12, *American.* 13, *Dealt.* 15, *Non-stop.* 17, *Dribble.* 19, *Fly-past.* 21, *Stentor.* 22, *Latin.* 24, *Mill-race.* 27, *Brainwave.* 28, *Cobra.* 29, *Tony.* 30, *Doss houses.*

Down. 1, *Fife.* 2, *Even money.* 3, *Coker.* 4, *Race cup.* 5, *Unlined.* 7, *Liana.* 8, *Greatheart.* 9, *Off-drive.* 14, *Snaffle-bit.* 16, *Training.* 18, *Bath cubes.* 20, *Timpano.* 21, *Sellers.* 23, *Twain.* 25, *Recto.* 26, *Pals.*

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PASSION FRUIT

Give me women as soft, and as delicate, and as velvet as my peaches! . . . with peaches and women, it's only the side next to the sun that's tempting.

OUIDA, *Strathmore*

These were the distant fruits of a garden childhood:
Yellow fluff on the hard astringent quince—
Finger-scratched to smooth small streets and lanes;
Cornelian-coloured ball of pomegranate,
Split in shining cups of pirate rubies
Set each against each like bee-cells in white silk;
Figs that we shredded, pulpy soft and purple,
Throwing aside the dry and skeined imposters,
Their milkflesh stained with russet short-cut threads.

Sunday fruit was silver-bought. But these
Grew in the garden, formed a roadside hedge,
Concealed us from the coinage of the world.
Amongst the quince, the fig, the pomegranate
We hid away with glossy greensprung secrets;
Lay quiet and heavy, sweet with an edge of bitter
Under the lazy heat, the languorous season:
Breathless to be plucked and by love consumed.

RUTH MILLER, *Fruit*

The Core of the Matter

He was herding his cattle on Mount Gargarus, the highest peak of Ida, when Hermes, accompanied by Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite, delivered the golden apple and Zeus's message: "Paris, since you are as handsome as you are wise in affairs of the heart, Zeus commands you to judge which of these goddesses is the fairest."

Paris accepted the apple doubtfully. "How can a simple cattleman like myself become an arbiter of divine beauty?" he cried. "I shall divide this apple between all three."

"No, no, you cannot disobey Almighty Zeus!" Hermes replied hurriedly . . .

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"Will it be enough to judge them as they are?" Paris asked Hermes, "or should they be naked?"

"The rules of the contest are for you to decide," Hermes answered with a discreet smile.

"In that case, will they kindly disrobe?"

Hermes told the goddesses to do so, and politely turned his back . . .

Aphrodite sidled up to him, and Paris blushed because she came so close that they were almost touching.

"Look carefully, please, pass nothing over . . . By the way, as soon as I saw you, I said to myself, 'Upon my word, there goes the handsomest young man in Phrygia! Why does he waste himself here in the wilderness herding stupid cattle?' Well, why do you, Paris? Why not move into a city and lead a civilized life? What have you to lose by marrying someone like Helen of Sparta, who is as beautiful as I am, and no less passionate? I am convinced that, once you two have met, she will abandon her home, her family, everything, to become your mistress . . ."

"Would you swear to that?" Paris asked excitedly.

Aphrodite uttered a solemn oath, and Paris, without a second thought, awarded her the golden apple.

ROBERT GRAVES, *Greek Myths*

Tinker, Tailor . . .

Plop fall the plums; but there are still seven.
Let those gentlemen that would court me
Come while it is lucky!

Plop fall the plums; there are still three.
Let any gentleman that would court me
Come before it is too late!

Plop fall the plums; in shallow baskets we lay them.
Any gentleman who would court me
Had better speak while there is time.

Chinese Song of Courtship, translated by ARTHUR WALEY

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Cherry Ripe

The young man, perched insecurely in the slender branches, rocked till he felt slightly drunk, reached down the boughs, where the scarlet beady cherries hung thick underneath, and tore off handful after handful of the sleek, cool-fleshed fruit. Cherries touched his ears and his neck as he stretched forward, their chill finger-tips sending a flash down his blood. All shades of red, from a golden vermilion to a rich crimson, glowed and met his eyes under a darkness of leaves . . .

Miriam came out wondering . . .

" Clouds are on fire," he said.

" Beautiful! " she cried.

She seemed so small, so soft, so tender, down there. He threw a handful of cherries at her. She was startled and frightened. He laughed with a low, chuckling sound, and pelted her. She ran for shelter, picking up some cherries. Two fine red pairs she hung over her ears . . .

D. H. LAWRENCE, *Sons and Lovers*

'Twas on a Sundae Morning

Whenas the rye reach to the chin,
And chopcherry, chopcherry ripe within,
Strawberries swimming in the cream,
And schoolboys playing in the stream;
Then, O then, O then, O, my true love said,
'Till that time come again
She could not live a maid.

GEORGE PEELE, *The Old Wives' Tale*

Fruitful Pursuit

Laughing and shrieking, my Uncle Silas and the widow were running races under the trees. My Uncle Silas had taken off his coat and collar and was running in his stockinged feet. The only thing the widow had taken off was her belt—unless my Uncle Silas had taken it off for her, because it was he who held it in his hands.

" Gittup there, gal! " he kept saying. " Gittup there! "

Every time he said this the widow gave her rich fruity peals of laughter and when I last saw her disappearing beyond dense masses of apple boughs at the far end of the stone pit she was only a yard or so ahead of my Uncle Silas and all the big red loaf-like pile of her hair was tumbling down.

" Gittup there, gal! " he was calling. " Git up, me old beauty! "

H. E. BATES, *The Widder*

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BY JANE GASKELL

CHELSEA BRAT

JEAN'S arms ached. Eric was rocking tough—he was quite sure he was rocking tough—and it would be unwise to request him, however piteously, to try it as usual. He had been present the other night at a palais when a fight had broken out: he'd not been attacked, but had a purplish cicatrice on one arm

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where a broken bottle had passed him. He showed this to everyone and had changed his style of rocking.

Jean, wearily whirling, lost the beat completely and didn't even bother to flounder to get it back. It was no fun on the other end of Eric's jerks and propulsions while he attempted to crouch over one and would not let it occur to him that he was too short. They seemed to be unable to communicate, even while rocking they were on different wavelengths. Not only that, he was repellent.

The candlelight flickered on the set faces: Doug had hours since concentrated himself into a trance over his bass beat, Sime was flattened to the keyboard, the band's nineteen-year-old pride 'n' joy leaned eyes closed to the efficient ecstasy of his trombone. The band's inch-thick crêpe soles thumped as one on the boards, black with the grease of years of dancing. The dancers' bare feet retreated into shivering pools of shadow. As it retreated each of the dozens of feet, some off beat, half turned and then back.

Over in the corner a blonde couple, only their heads revealing their presence in the darkness, continued their hip movements with an extra communication since her hair had tangled in his beard. The rockers hipped suddenly aside; the true jivers took over, the ecstasy left the dancers who smiled on the floor the way no dedicated rocker would ever do, ecstasy switched to the trombonist and drummer so Jean, forgetting her arms—at last and without trying, forgetting even her companion—was merged with the other listeners *in* the jazz, except that the golden trombone *was* their blood.

Well, of course Jean was by this time completely stuck with Eric.

As long as he continued to take her rocking no one else would dream of asking her on the floor, and if he dropped her she'd never get taken out at all because he was the only teenaged male she knew.

It couldn't matter less, she would think, if at fifteen which I suppose is quite young I'm tipped for a while out again from the world and am back in the normal home-and-school existence.

It matters, she would think, it matters.

As they sat in the circle on the floor around the Group a boy whose vitality she had been watching all evening noticed her for the first time. He took a ten of King Size from the pocket of his red velvet bumfreezer, flicked up the silver paper, and offered. He must think she was with the girl directly beside her, behind whom Eric was a little hidden. Her head ready to shake smiling, Jean thought, But *why* not? and said," Thanks, only I'm no good at smoking."

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" Sure, have one. I'll teach you," he said.

Such kindness warmed the cockles of her heart and she placed the cigarette between her lips, which pinkened it—she was still too new to lipstick to be able to acquire the jazz-cellar habit of leaving it off. He lit the cigarette with a match kindled by a careless backhand rasp on the right-hand side of the back of his jeans. They were hip jeans, obviously new and pre-sale faded.

" Thanks."

" Draw, p-p-p— y'know? " He made a thing of looking into her near eyes as he cupped the flame for her. It jittered unnervously, lit up his pupils, and in them her own face, double, preternaturally bug-eyed and goldfish-mouthed. Doubtless, she thought, in each of those four little eyes of mine his are reflected and mine again in them, this is really an infinite contact. But in his eyes, instead of letting them disturb her as they obviously meant and could, she watched the flame suck from itself a division which went glowing round the front circle of her King Size. At the same time her nostrils—her real ones, not the ones in his eyes—filled with something acrid, her throat harshened, and the last she saw of the faces in the eyes were little suddenly-red ovals as she grabbed away the cigarette and coughed and coughed.

The boy laughed, disconcerted, and walloped her on the back.

The band was too loudly absorbed to notice a thing.

By a superhuman effort she stopped, swallowing several times to quench her throat.

" See? " she gulped. " No good at it. Cough and cough."

" You should do it more often, get used to it. Be fine then, I swear." He brought out a lovely, almost-unsoiled large handkerchief, striped round the edges, and wiped her eyes while smiling into them. She could tell he had by now felt his way into the relationship they'd have—he, sexy big brother. Between billows of hanky she smiled up at him, not underdoing tremulousness.

While they sat back again to listen, the red velvet arm round her which she wasn't sure she liked as it groped a little, she glanced to Eric.

There had been a rustle of horror around her when she coughed, but Eric, who was sure he was an addict of modern jazz, had not noticed a thing and had not once stopped tapping his sandals, his head tipped to one side, the side away from her. Actually the Group was playing trad; and well enough to enthral its audience, even though this was composed mainly of rockers and not jivers or listen-addicts.

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Came the intermission; the drummer, Sime, and Doug, though silent, hung on till the last echo of the trombone's final ecstatic self-assertion had faded away, then each collapsed slumped on his instrument and croaked for cool clear whisky.

A large left foot missed crushing Jean's fingers, but the right foot didn't. A boy-with-a-guitar from amongst the audience was leaping to the fore to fill the few moments' gap and if possible get discovered.

" Be careful, can't you, mate? " Jean's new companion snarled through his cigarette. " You just trod on my chick's fingers."

" Oh—oh, sorry," mumbled the guitarist, looking down, staring with apologetic resentment at Jean, nearly dropping his guitar, thinking, Oi-oi, I've got myself in wrong already with part of the audience.

" Pass it, cat," the other replied airily, having delivered his rebuke and now dismissing the offender.

The guitarist was not bad, nor the stand-in drummer, and Jean, throwing Eric to the winds, let the rescuer yank her to her feet.

The Group, sipping whisky and milk, stood round the walls, watching their temporary place-fillers without interest, indulgent or otherwise.

Eric, for the first time, saw and glared. His glasses steamed with incredulous indignation. Though far from taking Jean seriously, since meeting her *he* had never violated the unwritten law by dating another girl.

There was a thin striped sweater there when the red velvet was flung aside. From the start it was a joy crawling with a muscular boy in a sweater. Nice to hold a genuine shoulder. For best Eric wore a horrid little dark Toni-suit, with the shoulder-pads sagging because there was nothing to keep them up. Nevertheless, loyally but sincerely she would have thought of him as elegant, only he *would* lecture and boss and patronise.

This boy did not rock at all; he insisted on crawling so that his arms kept her close against him all the time.

Each time they passed Eric she looked at him, but expressionlessly. She was not sure whether to feel guilty, or defiant, or bored. He leaned moodily against the blow-up of a flayed corpse, and glared reproachfully at her. He did not ask anyone else to dance, though there were several girls rather boldly accompanied only by each other. She began to feel rather ashamed. The next time they passed him he had removed his glasses for something to do, and was polishing them. Without them he looked young and cross and lost.

This boy's muscles—she could feel nearly all of them, his

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couple of garments being taut enough to strike matches all over on—were interesting her a lot, she had never even guessed about some of them. These, for instance, below the ribs, a whole bumpy disturbing cross-hatching of them, and these, below the biceps—she had not a vestige of them, not that she had more than a vestige of biceps. Of course, she'd seen them in pictures, and on Kirk, but she'd thought those exceptional, exaggerations, conventions, like poetic licence—

He was now breathing on her neck, two tingling breaths—he breathed through his nose—and now his teeth grazed her neck as he breathed suddenly, " Hey, how's about you'n' me having ourselves a real ball tonight, huh, a real ball? I know a hop down in W.10 where the Teds do their tiny nuts— "

" No slumming, thank you. My boyfriend has a lovely scar from that very— "

" This lair's different. They're used to getting a lot of sightseers and Youth Investigators, they all show like they're expected to, and never do in visitors, only each other. They're very publicity-conscious. So O.K.? "

" O.K.," said Jean, putting on her shoes. " I'll tell Eric—he might like to come too."

" Your boyfriend's *here*—? " said this boy.

And, Oh damn, thought Jean, you can almost hear him thinking, Ho. He thinks he's so devastating that I've deserted Eric for him just like that. Shall I make some excuse now in case he's too much not-my-line-of-thing for me to handle—or perhaps he'll understand if he meets Eric—or perhaps Eric *will* come with us?

Eric had just been handed a bill for the several cokes he'd consumed that evening. He blinked with added resentment at Jean. She, being skint, had refused any, so he couldn't charge her for half the total; there was only one thing to be done. He took from his pocket the carpenter's pencil he always carried in order to be able to embarrass any square adults he saw by sketching them, and with a skilful flick gave a tail to the big black 7 on the bill, thus making it a 2.

" Eric," said Jean, avoiding introductions since she'd not yet been told her new escort's name, " will you come down to W.1c with us—? "

" Go to a lair and sightsee some Teds, I presume? " Eric raised one eyebrow. Jean had never before noticed that he was capable of such a thing.

" Yeah, man."

" That's old stuff to me. But I wouldn't stand in your way Jean."

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Why can't I hit him? So, shrinking inwardly and with head held high, Jean walked out into the a.m. night.

"I'll take care of her, mate," her escort sneered jovially back at Eric, left there standing.

"If you lose her, simply follow the trail of KD finger-written in all the dusty windows," Eric said, and walked away.

Jean flushed. How did Eric know about Kirk? She'd never told Eric about Kirk Douglas; in a way she admired Eric too much to admit to him of having a baby-teenager crush. She walked, frowning. Except for this boy's red velvet arm round her, she might have been alone, for her heels clicked on the sharply resonant paving stones, and the crêpe soles of his brothel-creepers made only the occasional sinister squish as they didn't bother to avoid something like an ancient fruit down there before them.

There came out of the night behind them, swiftly approaching, charging upon them, the stern stirring chugging cacophony of a night-outside-the-law cordon of motorbikes.

They drew level with the noctambulists without seeming to see them. Then, without any sign or spoken word, the formation was broken and the motorbikes were weaving again and again, turning corners, leaning almost on their sides, round the boy and Jean.

Further progress along the pavement was impossible. They were hemmed in, unable to advance, retreat, or side-dash by a moving barrier. Instinctively, Jean found, they were standing back to back. They watched the dull gleam of the mounted boys' black leather jackets, the backs stencilled red with the bar-separated initials of the club. But the riders still appeared not to see their nucleus. Only every now and then, as one in the line swerved skilfully past, nearly grazing Jean's nylon with his mudguard, she caught the individual glitter in an anonymous eye under the black peak. None of them wore crash helmets, but over their sideburns and grease-dark quiffs each wore a black peaked cap.

Now silent passivity was losing its dignity.

The lines were drawing tighter and closer, would presently form a still-moving knot. Jean was shivering. The alternate interleaved roar and purr of the exhausts was the only communication you had with these attackers. It was an intense love-hate relationship. The intensity, the imminence was now so great that when you remembered it might have been anybody else here with them instead of you, it would have been anyone else who'd happened to be on this pavement at this moment, there was a pang.

Now what would happen? Would they be butted to their

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knees by the relentless machines? Into the gutter? Battered just " for the kicks "?

Of one thing she was reasonably certain. They wouldn't be robbed. That was beneath the dignity of these clubs, and besides yielded no kicks.

She was beginning to recognise one of the boys, his cap was tipped so far back that presumably it stayed on only by the suction in the whorls of his many curls, and his sideburns descended snakily, following the line of his chin till they met in a tuft. This accentuated the smug grimness of his lower lip. He might possibly be the leader; he had been at the apex of the formation as it approached on the road.

Suddenly the boy with her had pulled this one from his bike, just as it had seemed about to ram them.

With one hand grasping the lamb-furred lapel of his jacket, he pulled him over from his saddle; the other hand caught him full up on the chin with a crack that immediately halted the beautifully trained line.

The bike, since it hadn't been going more than twenty miles an hour, merely made a sad circular toppling motion.

Without a yell, the whole gang hurled itself on her boy. They loved him, said the gleam in their narrowed eyes; this was what they'd been yearning for. Look down from the eyes. An alarming number of black-nailed fingers were flicking open sudden knives.

Her boy slung their staggering leader at them, hands still clutching at handlebars as long-curved as the horns of savage exotic cattle, got his back to the bricks of the churchyard wall, and poked forward the empty-saddled bike. It was too heavy for him to lift and sling at such a moment, but longways it was an obstacle.

Jean edged herself along the wall and ran. There was a phone box only a few yards up the road; they'd passed it, she remembered. She ran wildly. One of her shoes came off. She splashed into a puddle. There were not many street lamps. They must have seen her though—one at least must have seen her get away. She couldn't hear pursuit. She wasn't wasting breath in looking back.

She caught at the phone box, swung herself round it, and through its panes faced panting down the street.

Didn't they *care* that she'd got away?

She darted into the box, shut the door, carefully read the notice through the scrawls of obscene doodles and words, scrabbled in her purse, and discovered she'd nothing but a penny and a ten-bob note.

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She leaned her forehead against the glass. It was not even satisfyingly cool under the night-long stare of its accompanying street lamp, and she sobbed.

She read the notice again and discovered that she could dial the operator free and of course demand help. She was doing so when the door behind her clicked open. Paralysed, except that she was still whimpering under her breath, she even now did not turn but continued dialling while gazing into the cracked mirror, hypnotised by the sight of a large lone unsavoury-jacketed Ted entering her box.

Her finger slipped; she gasped and began again.

"Don't mind me," said the Ted courteously. "I only come for the books. Is there any in here?"

"I—I don't know."

"Oh, look, course there are." He stooped and took the pile of phone books from their shelf. Balancing them in his arms, he paused before going out and said, "Cold nights like these, you don't get many books. Sorry I was a bit speedy, thought you might be after them at first when I saw you in here. They're always taken before you gets there, almost, these days. Wish they had stiff covers."

"Yes. You burn them?"

"Urr." He went out, civilly remarking, "Ta-ah."

"Ta-ta," automatically replied Jean—shrinking from returning incivility and offending him in spite of her suspense—through the terrible brr-brr in her ears which, before the operator answered, continued for hours, during which she saw visions of her friend lying in a gutter as red as his velvet. And it's all my fault, he wouldn't have left if it hadn't been for showing off to me, or if he had at least it wouldn't have been my responsibility to get help. I wouldn't have known a thing about it.

At last she got on to someone at the other end of the line.

Whimpering, she managed to get them far more excited than she felt herself, and when she left the box seconds later the police had promised they were on their way.

Her knees for a moment would not support her. She pulled her sweater sleeve across her tears, wondering why she could not control herself. She felt so perfectly calm inside.

Leaving the box, she wandered down the street a little.

There was no point in staying where she was all night—if the police passed her on their way to the scene she'd know all was safe, but if not, not—and if she were going to walk it must also be towards the massacre, but she was certain that she and the police must arrive only in time to view the body.

A figure ahead of her, crossing the light-strips and alley

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shadows, was recognisable as the Ted with the phone books. She caught up with him. It seemed worth it—she could tell him now—even if he disapproved of her contacting the police it was done now and nothing to lose—with luck.

He turned as she pattered breathily to his side.

"Oh, it's you," he said, embarrassed as to how to greet the same outsider twice in one night.

"A motorbike gang have got my friend down by the churchyard. I've just phoned the police but there are about eight of them. Could you—have you got any friends near?"

"You mean and help?"

He seems particularly incredulous, doesn't he? I might have known.

"*Please.*" She clasped an arm round his, nobly ignoring the texture of his sleeve, and looked up with the appeal of desperation forced through every line of her face into his.

His eyes shifted uncomfortably—they weren't used to this—but presently they came back for more. She knew she looked the more-or-less opposite of his own girl.

"Which mob is it?"

She described the insignia on their jacket-backs.

The Ted used a word which Jean ticked with interest as one she'd never heard before, and she'd thought she'd learnt the lot recently.

"I'll see," he said. "De-pends 'ow many of us are round. Don't promise nuffink. Dig?"

Jean nodded. She could tell how polite he was being. His eyebrows were quivering proudly with the strain.

His whistle was three high notes, two low, the last an El-type bent-note.

There were no more than three heart-beats to wait before two Teds emerged padding from an alley, another unwound himself from the shadows of a storehouse doorway. A girl trailed after him, wiggling but as if she saw really no point in it.

"Oosasquidge?" one asked.

But Jean's was not answering questions. He gave his ideas in a couple of monosyllabic sentences. "I would have me best shoes on today," said one. The others grinned slowly. They all set off down the street.

Indeed there was a peculiar sound in the distance now, which showed that something was still happening, and it didn't sound like the police had arrived yet either. The sounds were the growls of motorbikes in swift but oddly spasmodic action. There were also one or two yells under that, angry yells.

So at least it isn't all over . . .

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The time she'd been alone must have been far, far less than it had seemed, but even so Jean could not really understand how one boy could stand out against eight. She wished the Teds would walk quicker. They were obviously eager, their foolish grins were cocked forward to the sounds, and their shoulders beginning to hunch, but they kept up the game of sauntering casually, with no intent.

She walked beside the one who'd first met her. She intended not to leave him till the last moment. She didn't like the look of the girl, who was trailing behind, wiggling more and more sulkily as no one spoke to her. She kept staring at Jean.

Even the Teds, thus wasting more time, gaped in admiration as they turned the corner.

The one boy, bleeding copiously and with a red velvet sleeve in shreds, was mounted on a bike and butting viciously with it at anyone who got within knifing distance of him. One or two others had got mounted again but he kept them at bay; some were still trying, but he stopped them. A knife was thrown, reluctantly and inexpertly, but he was too quick. There was a club member moaning furiously on the pavement farther away and nursing a shin all gory above his shredded pink-and-blue flowered sock.

With a happy howl the Teds surged forward.

There were some crashing blows, and suddenly all was well except for a bicycle chain which swung too far and caught its wielder in the waistcoat.

Jean stood watching beside the girl, who went on smoking—she didn't offer Jean one—and swinging her purse.

The police appeared round the corner. They were ignored till the last instant.

Several of the boys, croaking that they were maimed and promising retaliation, lurched to their bikes and zoomed away, completely out of formation.

Others remained looking up pathetically from beside their wheels, and one was yanked up at the last chance on his colleague's pillion.

Teds melted into alleys, shambling casually, but then could be heard pounding zigzag to their rat-holes.

Jean, though uneager, felt it her duty to stay with the police since she had called them, although the boy had already been hauled away by the kindly heroes. But as the police hurried across the road the Ted she'd met in the phone box grabbed her and she found that she too was dashing through a not particularly fragrant darkness.

There was a lot of winding, some steps down which she

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stumbled, grazing her arm—" That was steps," explained the Ted's indulgent voice—and finally they were all lurching, guffawing now, over the cobbles of a mews, completely unlit.

This is not only crazy, it's fool-hardy, it's insane. But none of it was my fault—this hand couldn't be shaken off in a billion years. I bet there're grease stains all over my new mohair, and it was a *good* thing, wasn't it, that I asked for help, otherwise it'd have been slaughter, wouldn't it? Only I'm all so tired, I only want to get tucked into bed. I can't keep my eyelids up, not that it matters in this dark; what have I let myself in for? how am I going to get home from here, wherever it may be? I wish this utter big wet would stop *hauling* me; I'm glad I got her to give me a key, of course it all started with leaving Eric flat, I knew perfectly well it was a mean thing to do, and I shouldn't have done it, only . . .

After dodging through several meaningless archways, eyes were assailed, a sudden blaze of light was yellowing the cobbles.

The feet had long since slowed their heavy escape. Now they kicked old milk bottles, competing—how many pieces could be splintered off at each roll?—and now they were entering an airless bare-bulb-lit room, an all-night café, scuffing the lino up the stairs leading from the back of it, up to their own lair.

The proprietor behind the counter for no apparent reason, the regulars mainly in black-tea-induced torpors over the cast-iron tables—Jean didn't mind their lack-lustre stares, but as she mounted to the upstairs room which was lined with boys and where girls were rocking, some even with boys, to the blare of the jukebox, she became aware that she'd surely be incapable of holding her own. Her youth, a different brand from theirs, was always accentuated by a draggled look, and she was nothing now if not draggled.

My nylons are plastered with ladders and mud, my hair couldn't be more—

" Somefin' 'appen, Derek? " inquired the youth leaning on the jukebox. His socks lit the room.

" Them ——" Derek named the motorbike club, " is round our manor again."

" They's our boys too," said a girl in a tight green skirt with black darts under the seat to make it stick out. None of the males in the room would have dared say that.

" Not now, they aren't," insisted Derek. " Not since they got them mucking bikes. There wasn't no pulling, not from them there wasn't. We bashed um up, afore They come, wot the squidge called. Igottasquidge. She were going to stay wiv

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Them," he said, gazing almost with fond pride across at Jean.

"Well, it was me called them," Jean explained apologetically.

Meanwhile, the boy in red velvet had been helped to the bench on the boys' side of the room. Several girls seized the unusual opportunity to crowd over.

"Wot yew done to yourself, boy?" inquired the girl in the green skirt. Obviously she was the accepted lair glamour—she spoke in a more or less American drawl, and pushed the Teds out of the way without incident. The other girls followed in the path she'd created, but without confidence, giggling and looking nervously from side to side, expecting the path to close dangerously up again at any moment.

One girl found that a hand had been shoved flirtatiously down the back of her sequined sweater. "Undoerbra, Nige!" someone advised. Nige embarked on the deed, while the girl wailed and kicked, and two other girls swung to her rescue with much flailing of chipped nail varnish but were thrust aside by happy Teds.

Jean was given an enormous mug by Derek.

"Djoo pre-fer tea?" he asked anxiously. "We can get some off of downstairs—on'y they get narky if you take it off the premises so we don't often bother less we feel like making a go of it. We just run outa cokes—"

Jean looked over the rim of the mug and found it contained scummy milk.

Feeling touched, she said, "This is really fine, thanks. I love milk. Don't you have a stove up here?"

"'Sonly the one room. 'N' theirs is in the basement."

Jean leaned back beside Derek, though under the jukebox blare he would keep asking who was her favourite star, and what was her favourite disc by him, and did she like the flicks, and did she des-pise Americans—they was only a country of mucking show-offs, wasn't they? And they took every mucking squidge they could mucking well get their bloody paws on.

She watched the boy in red velvet. The girls were leaning all over him. One, whenever she laughed, tossed her head so that it came artlessly down on his shoulder; then she'd peep up at him. The Teds, at first in an approving group round him, were beginning to eye him and mumble.

He occasionally glanced across at Jean. There was nothing wrong with him, she thought callously and without much relief, though she knew she'd have been appalled if he'd been really hurt. He was too obviously slumming, the way he treated the girls. The boys were beginning to notice it, shifting nervously from foot to foot. It was bad enough him going for their girls,

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without his doing it just for the slumming-kicks. He'd also been given a mug. He spat out a tooth after joggling it loose, then drank. The girls dutifully laughed. One with an immense silver ribbon through her red frizz was bandaging his arm. She'd torn the bandage off her petticoat because she'd bought two new frilly ones today, and was still giggling.

"Cold, innit?"

"Oh, I don't know," Jean said politely.

"Yeah, though," Derek said, "it's them books I went 'n' lost. Yor shivering. 'Ere, look, have a go of my jackit."

He removed it. Jean, knowing she could never hold her breath long enough but making what she hoped was an unobtrusive try, shrugged into it.

He didn't help her because he didn't know that such a thing was possible, but she gave him her bag to hold; hitherto she'd been clutching it.

He said what every man she'd ever been out with, from her Uncle Charles to Eric to Ken, always said whenever she gave them her bag to hold while she buttoned her coat. "Anyway, why do girls have stupid things like bags instead of just keeping it all in pockets?"

"Thanks for this," she said. She was already beginning to find its pungency endearing. She fumbled at the buttons, her fingers caught off-balance. It was peculiar the way a male coat buttoned over the opposite way to a female.

Shaking back the sleeves, she re-possessed herself of the bag, half crushed by his fingers, settled herself again on the bench which was crowded with mumbling self-sufficient groups of twos and threes not looking at each other, and glanced round the lair.

It was nicely kept, the wallpaper was coming down in strips which someone—probably a boy—had stuck up again, every last one of them, with sticky tape.

"Wanna dance?" suggested Derek. "I didn't ask before, on'y first time I arst a squidge like you to dance, it was at a palais. I had a experience—she said, 'Wotcha fink yor doing asking a girl like me?' and she walked off in front of everyone and I wouldn't never ask that kinda squidge for ages after. Course," he added broadmindedly, "that were when I were younger, and upset more easy, like I'm sixteen now."

After this account of a traumatic experience Jean had to dance.

He'd have been the despairing envy of Eric, he really rocked tough, nothing cool about it. He stood hunched over her, directing her by the pressure-signs of one large arm, occasionally beating a slab-sole on the boards already rattling with the

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vibrancy of El's fabulous raucousness. What with the fight that had gone before, there were soon big sweat stains under his armpits. He glanced surreptitiously round at everyone else in the room to see if he were the only one.

" Scusi; ' It, Son of Them,' " said the boy in red, tapping the shoulder Jean was just revolving past. " My chick, I believe."

Derek stopped the pressure so suddenly she nearly went flying. " Sure," he growled, betrayed. " I never said not, did I? "

He slunk away.

" He'll never dance again," Jean said. " He's terribly shy."

" Aw."

" Instead of dancing, couldn't we go home? You can't feel like anything but bed, and I'm dead."

" That coat suits you. Don't you find this fun? "

" No," she said sharply.

According to the quizzes she'd read, she seemed really not to be the Ideal Date, but still.

" Scared? Ah, they're a lot of big wets. As for your friend The Blob, he's obviously nutty. All he needs is a dose of disinfectant and he'll go clean round the bend."

" Why? "

" His girl-in-green's been giving him gory glances all evening."

" Thanks for rescuing him. By the way, you've not been too popular yourself. Come on, I'll drop in a minute and it's miraculous you've not."

" Leaving now, and thanks. I'll never forget what you've done for me," he said gravely to Derek by the door.

" Sure. If you see them phone books you might post um on," Derek said facetiously, embarrassed.

" Here's your coat, Derek. Thanks for everything."

" Not at all," he said with old-world courtliness.

" Ta-ta." Jean followed the still anonymous bumfreezer down the dawn-paling tenement.

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★ *Now 19, with an Australian mother and Scots father, Jane Gaskell has wanted to write since she was a child, and a couple of years ago her two novels,* Strange Evil, *and* King's Daughter, *were published by Hutchinson. Like her other* Argosy *stories, they were fantasy. Her current work for newspapers has given her a taste for real life: she has run three Fulham clubs for boys, and knows at firsthand something of the background of* Chelsea Brat.

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An ALFRED HITCHCOCK Choice . . .

The case of M. J. H.

By Henry Slesar

IT wasn't peace that Maude Sheridan made with the world after she reached the age of thirty-five, still unmarried; it was more of a truce. The conditions were few but severe. She was to have a small degree of financial security, adequate health, and her job as secretary to Dr. Ernest Cowper, one of the better-known psychoanalysts in the eastern states. Of all the conditions, the last was the most important.

Seven years ago she had answered Dr. Cowper's classified ad. and been chosen over an anteroom-full of hopeful, bespectacled psych graduates. She was older than she should have been for the job, and her background wasn't nearly as good as the other candidates', but the chemical reaction between her and the grave-faced, ageing analyst had been excellent. He liked her and she liked him, and for seven years they had worked together, with Maude's responsibilities growing greater every day as Dr. Cowper's practice expanded. She was more assistant than secretary, and there were moments, casual moments, when he confided in her.

So Maude Sheridan coexisted with the world, and relaxed the struggle of hairbrush, comb, and lipstick, of figure exercises and diets. Until she met Jimmy French.

When they were introduced at a party, given by a next-door neighbour, she accepted his little courtesies and playful ribbing with good grace and no hope of anything more. Even when he telephoned her the next day, she didn't catch her breath at the sound of his voice; Maude didn't feel entitled to girlish exhilaration. But she went to see a film with him, and when he held her hand, she allowed it. There was a good-night kiss in front of her

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apartment door, but the touch of his lips didn't interfere with her quiet, placid dreams that night.

But he phoned back. And he phoned again. Two weeks after they met, she began looking at him carefully, wonderingly. He wasn't handsome, but he grinned likeably, and his hair was thick and black and strokeable. He wasn't tall, but there was muscular grace inside his well-made clothes. He wasn't well educated but he had a swift, natural understanding of things. He was even cunning. She didn't like that part much, but it was true. There was fox in him.

Then she began looking at herself, long reflective moments before her mirror. She was too plump, she thought. Not bad-looking at all, but she needed *doing*; there had been too much neglect. She started returning to beauty parlours, began the dieting and the figure exercises. She was doing it for Jimmy French, because Jimmy liked her, truly liked her.

" I love you," Jimmy said one night.

She was so startled, she wanted to cry out.

" Love you," Jimmy repeated, bundling her in his arms. " Look, I know I'm not much. I mean, you're a billion times smarter than I am, Maude. I never got through high school. Maybe you think I'm a mug or something."

" No! Oh no," she said.

" I never thought a girl like you would ever look at me twice," he said, his rough cheek against her ear.

A few moments later, her truce with the world was shattered, but she didn't care. They sat beside each other and talked. He said a lot of things, some of them startling, but she didn't care about that either. Only later she remembered, and asked him to say them again.

" All right, now you know the worst," he said tightly, lighting a cigarette and hiding his face in the smoke. " I'm a pretty rotten guy, Maude. I was a wild kid, in hot water all the time, stealing tyres, cars, even armed robbery. I'm not hiding it from you."

" But you were young," she said defensively. " You didn't know any better."

He grinned at her. " Yes, Doctor," he said. " How much d'you charge an hour, Doctor? "

" Be serious, Jimmy."

" I am. What I mean is, I don't have any trade, Maude, nothing that could give us any kind of life. I've had four lousy jobs in the last two years, I'm just no good for you."

She cradled his head in her arms; he was like a child when he talked seriously, a solemn, dark-haired child. " Let me decide that."

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" But you don't know how I feel. A swell girl like you, saddled with a chap like me, that wouldn't be fair. I want to do something first, Maude, don't you see? Then I want you and me to get married."

It was the first time he had said married. It was a word out of an alien dictionary. She repeated it soundlessly, and said, " Nothing matters, Jimmy, believe me. I don't care about anything but you . . ."

The next day, her happiness was an aura, an emanation. Even Dr. Cowper, preoccupied as ever with the dual problem of his own burdensome years and the stormy conflicts of his patients, noticed it.

" You seem pleased with yourself today, Maude."

" Not especially," she said. " I just feel like *glowing* a little." She flushed in embarrassment, and consulted her notes. " Mr. Harrison's coming in at ten-thirty, Doctor, you wanted me to remind you about the change in his appointment time."

" Oh, yes." His face went dark again. " Poor Mr. Harrison . . ."

" Is it—I mean, has there been any progress? " She spoke carefully, knowing the subject was delicate.

" Not much. Sometimes I feel the fault is mine, that I should have had the answers long ago. Or else made some other arrangement with the man, something that would protect him from himself . . ." He sighed. " Send him in, Maude; I'll be waiting."

" Yes, Doctor."

Harrison was late; there was no question—his lateness was deliberate, a provocation. He was a burly, hard-breathing man in his fifties, with a collar so tight about his fleshy throat that it reddened his face. The tight collar, Maude thought, meant something; it was his way of adjusting to . . .

But she wasn't going to think about illness. She wanted to think about love, and about twelve o'clock, and about her lunch date with Jimmy.

She met him in the dim-lit recesses of a restaurant too expensive for every day. He ordered Martinis for them both. She was giddy, unnaturally excited, and so happy that her ordinary face brought glances from other men. Happy, until the coffee arrived, and Jimmy said, " I'm going to ask you for something, Maude. Something you're not going to like."

" What is it? What's the matter, Jimmy? "

" Nothing's the matter. Only me, that's what's wrong."

" What are you talking about? "

" I'm talking about us getting married, me with my fat fifty-

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dollar bank account, and no prospects. I've been thinking so much about it, I'm sick. You know how it is, you can just *think* about something and get sick. My stomach's rotten and my head hurts—"

She touched his brow. "You poor boy," she crooned. "Why didn't you say something? You—"

"It's no case for aspirin, Maude. It needs a better pill than that. A money pill, Maude, that's what it needs."

"I don't understand."

He leaned closer.

"Maude," he said quietly, "I told you a lie, I told you I was a wild kid, a bad kid. That was a lie. I was just an ordinary kid. The one I described, the car-stealer, the armed robber—that's me *now*, Maude. Right now."

"Jimmy, you're not serious—"

"Look at me, don't I look serious? I'm telling you the truth about myself, Maude, something I never told anybody else. I'm no good. I'm a crook, and a cheap one at that—"

"I won't let you say that!" She looked wildly about her, as if there were eavesdroppers everywhere. "You couldn't be that, Jimmy. You couldn't!"

His face relaxed. He took a sip of coffee, and made his tone of voice conversational.

"I want you to do something for me, Maude. It's the only time I'll ever ask you to do such a thing. Because I'm going to change. Right after it's over, I'll change."

"After what's over?"

"One more deal. Only one, so help me. But this has got to be a good one, good enough to give us a head start. I want you to bring me the files from your office, as many as you can carry. Only the current ones, the ones that tell about the patients he's had recently. No, don't say anything, let me finish. I don't want you to steal the files, Maude; I want you to borrow them. I'll go through 'em real quick, so fast that you can have them back in their place in the morning. Maybe I'll find what I'm looking for right away, maybe you'll have to do it again, once or twice. I promise you won't get into any trouble, Maude. Nothing'll go wrong."

His voice seemed thin and distant, and so did her own reply.

"What are you saying, Jimmy? Why do you want Dr. Cowper's files? What would they do for you?"

"It's just an idea I had last night. Maybe a good idea, a great idea. This analyst stuff, this is pretty personal, isn't it? I mean, they *have* to tell the doc everything, don't they?"

"Of course."

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"There're no secrets from an analyst, right? That would defeat the whole purpose. So I thought, what if I could see the doc's notes, if I could read through them . . .?" He gulped down the rest of his coffee. "Your boss has a lot of rich patients, Maude. They could afford a few grand; it wouldn't hurt them. But it would mean so much to me, to us . . ."

She looked at him, shaking her head, already denying him the terrible request.

"We won't talk about it any more," Jimmy said quickly. "Not now, Maude, not now."

They talked about it that night, and she said no again, and cried in his arms, and swore that they didn't need money to be happy. He didn't argue with her, but his face was determined.

For the rest of that week, her misery was a tangible, physical thing; she was out of the office for two days. The next week was even worse; they had agreed not to see each other for a while, and Maude discovered that the agreement was torture.

She phoned him at home, and pleaded with him, humbly. He came to see her, and they had their first shouted argument, and he threatened to commit crimes even worse than the relatively clean crime of blackmail.

And the third week, Maude Sheridan agreed to bring him Dr. Cowper's files.

It was the worst day of her life. As a business day, it wasn't extraordinary. Dr. Cowper was in good spirits: a patient had "graduated" and he had no appointment with his most difficult case, the troubled Mr. Harrison. He asked her jocular questions about Jimmy, and she tried to smile her answers.

At four o'clock he decided to leave and suggested that she end her day early; she said no, there were letters to type, and some filing to be done. He patted her shoulder, and went out.

When he was gone, she made up her face carefully, disturbed by the pale image she saw in her compact mirror. Then she went to the file in the inner office and slid open the drawer marked *Current*.

She took out only half of the folders, making sure to keep them in proper order. She found a large manila envelope, and placed the folders inside, sealing the flap tightly. With an instinct for efficiency, she marked the envelope: *If lost, please return to Miss Maude Sheridan, c/o Dr. Ernest Cowper, 1601A Park Avenue.* Then she closed the door, turned out the lights, and left. The entire business took less than five minutes.

She went straight to Jimmy's apartment, a barren, unlovely flat in a shabby neighbourhood. He seemed to be trying not to

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appear gleeful when he saw the bulky envelope in her hand, but he couldn't hide his pleasure completely.

She said, "Please. Keep the files in order; they're not much more than notes, and a lot of them won't even make sense to you. Don't get them mixed up, Jimmy; it's terribly important."

"Don't I know it," he grinned. "We don't want him getting suspicious, do we?"

"That's not what I meant. They're Dr. Cowper's files; they're important to his work."

"I'm sorry," he said contritely. "I'll be careful, darling; trust me."

She went out and bought groceries at a shop on the corner, frozen steaks and french-fried potatoes. She cooked his supper for him, enjoying the domestic feeling it gave her.

But Jimmy was too busy to be appreciative. When she was cleaning up in the tiny kitchen, he lay sprawled on the sofa with Dr. Cowper's often cryptic notes, studying them intently until almost midnight. It was only then that he broke his silence.

"Here it is, this is the one!" he said gleefully. "This case marked M.J.H. Who is he, Maude? Who's the man?"

"Oh no. Not that one, Jimmy."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Harrison, Martin Harrison. He's a securities analyst, something like that. I—I suppose he's wealthy, all right. But he's such an unhappy man, Jimmy, don't make it worse—"

He smiled. "Doesn't sound so unhappy to me. Sounds as if he's having a good time, with this girlfriend of his. Seventeen years old! And he's what, fifty-four?" He frowned at the expression on her face. "What's the matter, honey? Didn't you know about it?"

"No. Dr. Cowper's talked about Mr. Harrison, but he never said anything about that. He just said that he had a serious problem—"

"He's the problem," Jimmy chuckled. "Mostly to his wife. Only she doesn't know about it yet, see? That's right here in the notes. I read just enough of them to get the picture. He's got this girlfriend, and he's worried sick about his wife finding out. But he can't quit, either. She means too much to him. Imagine, an old guy like that—"

"Stop it, Jimmy!"

"Aw, look, I know it's not pretty, Maude. But a guy like this—you really can't feel *sorry* for him, can you?"

"I do!"

He shook his head, admiringly. "You're wonderful, Maude, you know that? I guess that's why I love you so much. You'd

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feel sorry for a mad dog, wouldn't you?" He began replacing the papers in the file. "But this is the man, honey. The one I need. Martin J. Harrison."

He went to the telephone book, and looked eagerly through the H's. He found what he wanted, and made a note of the address on a scrap of paper taken from his wallet. Then he squared Dr. Cowper's files on the coffee-table, and slipped them neatly into the large manila envelope.

"You can take these back in the morning," he said. "If you get there early, the doc'll never know they were gone. There, you see, Maude? Didn't I keep my promise? You see how easy it was?"

"Yes," Maude said miserably. "So easy . . ."

She didn't see Jimmy at the weekend; her only contact with him was a telephone call on Saturday afternoon.

"I called Mr. H.," he said, in a contained voice. "Everything is working out, honey."

"Jimmy, please think it over—"

"I've thought about it enough, Maude. After this weekend it'll all be over, and I'll be just what you want me to be."

"This weekend?"

He lowered his voice.

"No use putting it off. I'll meet him some time tomorrow, when he can get away without making his wife suspicious. He's coming to make a deal. I set the price high; so he's liable to bargain. I'm ready for that. I know how to compromise. It can't miss, Maude."

She couldn't answer.

"Maude? Are you listening?"

"I'm listening, Jimmy."

"I love you, Maude."

Then he hung up.

When she arrived at the office on Monday morning Dr. Cowper wasn't there. She had no explanation for the two patients who showed up for their appointments, and had to send them away with invented excuses about ill health; her call to the doctor's home produced nothing but a ringing telephone.

She went to lunch at twelve, to the same restaurant she frequented every noon, but the familiar setting seemed strange and unreal. When the waitress asked for her order, she looked at the menu and felt ill. The thought of food was impossible; she excused herself and went back to the office.

Dr. Cowper walked in after two, looking graver and even older than usual.

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"Is everything all right, Doctor?" she asked. "Are you feeling all right?"

He stopped at her desk, and opened his mouth as if to speak. Then he changed his mind, and sat down in the chair beside her, putting his hand over his eyes.

"What is it, Doctor? What's wrong?"

"I've lost a patient, Maude," he said. "Lost him the hard way . . ."

"A patient? Which one?"

"My problem case. I should have known better. I should have realised he needed more help than I was able to give him. Then it might not have happened . . ."

"Mr. Harrison?" The name was a cold blade against her chest.

"Yes, Mr. Harrison. I knew there was a dark force in him, Maude; that it was getting closer to the surface every day. But I never expected anything like this." He took his hand from his eyes and looked at her.

"He killed a man yesterday, Maude. The police contacted me this morning, and I went to see him. He shot and killed a man who was trying to get money from him."

"Money?" she said, in a voice expressing polite interest; her face giving nothing away.

"Yes. A blackmailer, Harrison said. A man who threatened to tell his wife about the young girl Harrison was in love with. But Harrison wasn't going to pay; he went to see the man and took a gun. He shot him dead, and now the police have him. A blackmailer! God knows how he could have learnt such a thing, how he could have made such a mistake . . ."

"What do you mean?" Maude Sheridan asked, in a rising voice. "What do you mean, mistake?"

"I mean there was no *cause* for blackmail—only the dark fantasies in the man's mind. There *was* no young girl, Maude; it was only Harrison's delusion; he was guilt-ridden about something that never existed. And when a blackmailer threatened him, he protected his fantasy with murder. The ultimate rationalisation . . ."

He sighed, and stood up.

Then he went into his office and closed the door, unaware of what his words had done to the staring, white-faced woman sitting in his anteroom.

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OUT OF THE SUN

Stained with brilliance,
the steps rose to the pink wall in golden fury

BY EVAN HUNTER

THE giant brown pods of the royal poincianas were motionless on the still hot air. Like huge, closed straight-razors, they hung lifelessly from the trees against a sky of baked blue enamel. In a few months they would bloom, but they hung in ugly limpness now in a Jamaica forsaken by the trade winds, an island aflame with tropical heat, persistent, relentless, still as death itself.

The taxi wound its way down through the heat, the sun reflecting dizzily from its polished hood and top. The native driver honked his horn incessantly and pedestrians along the side of the road inched closer to the kerb each time the horn sounded, balancing bundles on their heads, walking with the straight proud walk Michael had found absent in Nassau.

His wife sat beside him in the back of the taxi, both of them rendered mute by the intense heat. She wore a white blouse and white tapered slacks, a young blonde woman, magnificently tanned but still carrying on her face and in her eyes the lacquered look of the native New Yorker.

The cab came down out of the hills, the bay on its right resplendently blue under the brilliant sun. Michael thought of asking the driver to stop for a moment so that he could take a picture of the curving bay. And then the moment passed, the idea seemed to require too much energy. He slouched on the back seat, squinting his eyes against the sunshine which drenched the interior of the cab, wondering why he was always forgetting his sunglasses back at the hotel.

He was a tall thin man with bright blue eyes, startling against his tanned skin. He wore a white shirt open at the throat, and he was consciously aware of his lean good looks, imagining himself somehow as a white hunter in the heart of darkest Africa, a fantasy he knew to be absurd. And yet, not totally absurd. There *was* a primitive smell to the island and its people, a feeling that civilisation was worn by the tropics as haphazardly as a badly made suit.

"I hate this town," Diane said suddenly.

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He turned to look at her. Or rather, his eyes shifted towards her. He did not move his head or change his position. "It's not a bad town," he said.

"It's awful. I think we ought to go on to Haiti."

"No. I can't stand beggars."

"There are beggars here, too."

"Not like Haiti," he said. "In Haiti, they're all over the streets."

"A beggar or two might be exciting."

"No, thank you. That's not my idea of a holiday."

"What *is* your idea of a holiday?" she asked. "Never mind, don't bother. I know. You want a rest."

"Exactly."

"We've been resting for two weeks. When do we take a rest from resting?"

"It's not really that dull, Diane. Actually, this is a pretty interesting town. Plenty to buy here."

"I'm not interested in the business structure of Jamaica. And if another native urges me to buy a straw hat when any damn fool can see I'm already wearing one, I think I'll scream."

Michael laughed suddenly, a humourless laugh which rang emptily in the silent cab.

"I don't see what's so funny," she said. "I'm trying to tell you I'm bored."

"You were bored in New York, too."

"Yes, and that's why we came down here, isn't that right? For a change?"

"For a rest," he corrected.

"To get away from everyone we know—and your work, isn't that right?"

"I hate it when you do that."

"Do what?"

"Repeat yourself."

"Oh, I don't care what you hate. We came down here to get away from all the pressures, and instead . . ."

"If there are any pressures here," Michael said, "I'd like to know about them."

"Boredom is a pressure."

"Boredom, boredom! Has it ever occurred to you that it's pretty boring to hear you *talk* about boredom all the time?"

"I'm sorry if I annoy you."

"I didn't say that."

"It sounded like that to me."

"All I said was—well, what I object to is the way you keep going on about the same things. Like your *life*-role, and your

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search for identification, and your *meaning* as a woman. Why don't you just relax, Diane? The trouble with women today is . . ."

"I don't want to hear your thesis on the mechanised kitchen again."

He shrugged. "All right."

"Because if you want to know the truth, you're pretty damn boring yourself."

"Me?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, you. The Madison Avenue master mind with his new accounts and his new slogans and his new campaigns and his sales-up-fifty-per-cent. I've never met anyone in my life who was so concerned with making money."

"I didn't realise," he said with cold hauteur, "that providing for one's wife and family was being over concerned with—"

"There's a difference between—"

"—money. I suppose I'd be better off if I were a native chopping sugar cane in the goddam jungle and earning ten cents a week!"

"They don't chop sugar-cane in the jungle."

"On the plantations then. Wherever the hell they do it. Maybe you'd enjoy that?"

"Maybe I would. It might be *real*, at least."

"Oh, here we go on the fake existence theme again. The glitter of New York, the tinsel whirl of . . ."

"Don't you ever understand anything I'm saying?" she said angrily. "I hate it here and, damn it, I'm catching a cold!"

"How can anyone catch a cold in the tropics?"

"I don't know how. By contact with a germ, I would imagine. I'm catching one, that's all."

"It must be psychosomatic."

"Maybe it is. Michael, for the love of God, let's move on."

"I like Jamaica," he said flatly.

"This is the Parade, sir," the driver interrupted gently. "Did you want to get out here, sir?"

"Yes, thank you, Andrews," Michael said. "We'll only be an hour or so."

"I'll wait for you in front of Issa's, sir."

"Very well," Michael said. He opened the door and stepped into the sunshine. He held his hand out to Diane and she followed him on to the pavement.

"Why did you say 'Very well'?" she asked.

"What should I have said?"

"'Very well' sounds so British. You never say that in New York."

"Well, this isn't New York. This is the British West Indies."

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" That's no reason for you to put on airs. The driver must be laughing himself silly."

" He isn't laughing at all. He's thinking he'll get three dollars for the ride and a two-dollar tip, that's what he's doing."

" Not *everyone* thinks the way you do, Michael," she said. " It's hot. Can't we get over in the shade? "

They crossed the street and began walking under the narrow awnings lining the narrow pavement. The natives rushed past, carrying bananas to the wharf, carrying shopping baskets, intent on their personal affairs, their clothes bright and gaudy. Bicycles flashed in the sunshine, an ancient bus creaked round the circle near the straw market, a night-time sign warned DIP YOUR LIGHTS.

" What did you mean by that? " he asked.

" By what? "

" By everyone not thinking the way I do."

" About money. Everyone doesn't think it's that important. The driver may be thinking about other things."

" Like what? "

" Oh, Michael, like his family, or his wife; or—or—even taking a holiday in New York one day."

" He could never afford a holiday in New York."

" In Kingston then."

" He'd never be able to afford that, either."

" Well, that doesn't make him any less a man."

" What is it, Diane? Does my earning power annoy you? Must I constantly compete with my own wife in addition to the daily—? "

" You've told me about the Madison Avenue rat race, thanks. Please spare me."

" I'm awfully sorry, but that's the way things are. If you think—"

" Then *change* the way things are! Before it's too late! "

" I'll go out and buy a machete; would that suit you? And we'll live in a lovely corrugated tin hut. And you can do woodcarving while I'm out chopping sugar cane. Would that satisfy your need for self-expression? "

" It's not a joke! " she said, her voice suddenly loud in the sun-hushed street.

"All right, let's end it, Diane," he said softly.

" End what? "

" The argument." He paused, puzzled. " What did you think I meant? "

" I don't know."

They stopped stock still in the centre of the street.

" The argument," he said.

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"Yes. I heard you."

"Well, what did you think I meant? All I meant was the argument."

"Yes."

"Well . . ." He shrugged. "Well, let's end it, all right?"

"All right."

He nodded and tried a tentative smile. Their eyes met and held for an instant.

"Would you like a drink?" he asked.

"No. It's too early."

"Well, would you like to get out of the sun? These awnings don't help at all. I'm hot. Aren't you, Diane?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, let's get out of the sun, all right?" He shaded his eyes and looked up the street. "There's a place." He turned to her. "Antiques. Want to give it a try?"

"If you like."

They walked up the street in silence. The building was on the opposite side of the road, its front painted a bright tropical green. The sign Michael had seen hung from a rusted wrought-iron support.

AUTHENTIC ANTIQUES

COINS — JEWELLERY

BRITISH—JAMAICAN—SPANISH

An arrow pointed to a narrow flight of steps on the side of the building. The wall at the top of the steps was painted a shocking pink. The green of the building and the pink of the wall blended like the stem and bloom of a wild tropical flower, merged to give an impression of lush savagery stained with brilliant sunshine. The steps rose to the pink wall in golden fury, seemed to collide with the wall and a second painted red arrow indicating the door of the shop.

They climbed the steps slowly, she moving with unconscious femininity in the form-fitting white tapered slacks, he holding her elbow and moving gracelessly beside her, his expensive camera dangling from a leather strap round his neck. As they climbed the steps, he could not resist adding, "A man has to make a living, Diane," and then they reached the landing and entered the shop and were immediately blinded.

Slowly, their eyes adjusted to the dimness of the room.

Two windows opened on the street outside and twin shafts of sunlight pierced the gloom, dust motes tirelessly climbing them to the low ceiling. The walls were hung with clocks, and clocks

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peered into the gloom from behind the dust-covered fronts of ancient cases. A mesh cage was on one side of the shop, enclosing a table covered with the intricate wheels and springs of a disembowelled watch, a jeweller's eyepiece, a miniature screwdriver, a pair of tweezers.

Dust seemed to cover everything. Dust and heat permeated the shop, became the shop's lifeblood. Dust and heat seeped into every crack and corner until the shop seemed to possess a secret pulsing sound, the sound of silence and gloom and heat and dust commingled.

The old man came from behind the mesh cage, dust-coloured himself, a big man wearing a white shirt and pale blue trousers which hung sloppily over a loose paunch. A yellow silk tie was knotted carelessly about his neck. He breathed heavily as he walked towards them, his eyes touching Diane's face and then shifting slowly to Michael who wiped sweat from his upper lip with a clean white handkerchief.

"Yes, sir?" the man said. He did not smile. His eyes were dark black in a dry face the colour of dead ashes. His black hair, turning grey, clung wetly to his forehead. The laborious wheeze came from his thick lips when he spoke. "Yes, madam?"

"We're just looking," Michael said.

"For what, sir?"

"We're not sure. We . . . uh . . ."

He had not expected this. He had expected a neat precise refuge from the sun, a tourist shop with a clean tourist façade and not this cluttered den of stronger heat and hanging dust.

"Some clocks, perhaps, sir? Or some coins? Or some jewellery for the lady?"

For a moment, an awkwardness crowded into the shop. Michael knew instantly that they'd made a mistake, and he could see that Diane wanted nothing more than to get out of this small dark cave. Moreover, he felt the proprietor was fully aware of their discomfort and would be happy to see them leave. But none of them wished to appear rude, and so they went through the shallow pantomime of buyer and seller, no one truly intending to buy or to sell, the awkwardness not one of intent or purpose but simply one of ineptitude, a stuttering bow to the absurd demands of civilisation.

"My name is Barker," the fat man said. "This is my shop."

He extended his hand clumsily to Michael, and Michael gave it an unenthusiastic shake and then dropped it.

Barker turned to Diane and extended his hand again. She took it cautiously, as if she were picking up a loathsome object preparatory to dropping it in the wastepaper basket.

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Barker held her hand and brought it closer to his face as if he were about to kiss it in the continental manner. Then, still holding it, he examined the slender fingers and said, "A ring for madam, perhaps?"

"No, I don't want a ring," Diane said briskly, pulling back her hand. "We'd better go, Michael. Our driver is waiting."

Barker smiled palely. "In Jamaica, madam," he said, "all things can wait."

"Rings included," Diane said coldly. "Let's go, Michael."

Barker stepped into their path unobtrusively, almost gliding over the dusty floor, so that his interference did not seem at all like a deliberate obstruction, his eyes never leaving Diane.

"I have some beautiful things to show," he said. "Wait."

"I think—" Michael started.

"Wait," Barker said.

He went behind the counter. Michael glanced at Diane and gave a slight shrug of his shoulders. Her eyes met his coldly, more meaning in them than he could read. He frowned. Behind the counter, Barker wheezingly knelt and then came into view again, his ash-dust face appearing above the counter top, his eyes flicking again to Diane.

It seemed hotter in the shop now. Barker's shirt stuck to his flaccid body, giant blots of perspiration spreading from his armpits across his chest.

"Here," he said. "Look at this, sir."

He opened the case in his hands. A duelling pistol rested on black velvet, a handsomely wrought gun with silver filigree decorating the handle and twined round the barrel.

"That is a very old gun, sir," Barker said. "Look at it, sir. It is beautiful, is it not, sir?"

"Yes, it is," Michael said honestly, leaning closer to the pistol.

"You may hold it, sir, if you like," Barker said. He handed the pistol in its case to Michael and then turned again to Diane.

"That is an interesting watch you're wearing, madam," he said, and he glanced at the gold watch which hung from a chain about her throat, a small gold circle resting against the white pillow of her blouse.

"May I?" he asked, and before she could answer he reached for the watch, his thick fingers swooping towards it as gracefully and relentlessly as the vultures they had seen in Port Antonio yesterday dropping swiftly out of the sky. Delicately, his fingers plucked the watch from where it rested on her blouse.

He did not touch her and yet the careful exaggerated delicacy of his fingers as they plucked the watch from its nesting place was somehow a violation. Somehow the lack of physical contact

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implied a greater, more intimate contact. He held the watch on his thick palm and glanced at Michael who was examining the silver-filigreed pistol.

"This is an old watch, madam?" he asked Diane.

"No. It's new."

"Oh, but not so new, madam."

"I bought it a year ago."

"It has the appearance of an old watch, madam."

"It's not."

"That is a shame, madam," Barker said. "For the old things have greater value."

"Only to collectors of antiques," Diane said frostily, and Michael looked up from the pistol in his hands, startled by the unusual sound of his wife's voice.

"How much is this worth?" he asked Barker.

Gently, Barker allowed the pendant watch to return to its resting place. He turned wheezily to Michael, sighed, and said, "The pistol costs two hundred pounds, sir."

"It's beautiful," Michael said.

A thin smile crossed Barker's face. "But more than you care to spend, sir?"

"Oh, I wasn't considering buying it," Michael answered. "I was just curious." He wiped his lip again, and handed the pistol case back to Barker. "Come on, Diane. We'd better go."

"Wait," Barker said, and he held up a finger and looked again at Diane, and this time Michael saw the quick motion of his eyes and thought, Why, the old man is flirting with my wife!

The thought was somewhat amusing and also somewhat irritating, a curious mixture which nonetheless strengthened Michael's desire to leave the shop at once. "We really must go," he said.

"Just one moment, sir," Barker said. "I have something else to show you."

Michael turned to Diane. She rested against the dusty counter leaning on one elbow, the pendant watch hanging, a negative silhouette in gleaming white, a graceful curving silhouette from the tilt of her blonde head to the long lissom length of her legs in the tight tapered slacks. An odd smile was on her mouth, a smile Michael had never seen there before.

She did not move from the counter. She kept staring at the old man as he went to one of the ancient cases and pulled open a heavy drawer and then moved towards them with a large carved wooden chest in his hands.

"Let's go, Diane," Michael said. She seemed not to hear him. "Diane," he said. "Let's go."

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"No," she answered. "Let's see this."

Their eyes met for an instant, and he thought frozenly, She's enjoying the old man's attention, but he knew this was ridiculous, and yet there was the smile on his wife's face, a smile he had never seen there before, and he wiped again at his lip with his handkerchief. Outside in the street, he could hear the rushed babble of native speech and honking horns and sandalled feet beating the scorched pavement.

Barker approached, and the ticking of all the clocks in the shop suddenly registered on Michael's ears, a sound that was surely there all along but which he heard only now, the ticking of hundreds of clocks, and yet a ticking which was timeless, a ticking which was somehow not at all connected with the passage of time but which seemed instead to nullify it and render it meaningless.

"Let's go," he said sharply, but Barker was standing in their path again, his obese body wedged into the small entrance area between the counters. He held out the wooden chest, smiled wanly at Diane, and said, "Would madam care to open it?"

"Thank you," Diane said, and this time there was an unmistakable lilt to her voice, and she arched one eyebrow coquettishly. She smiled at the old man, a lazy mysterious smile, and then she slowly lifted the lid of the chest.

The beam of sunlight from the open window caught the contents of the box, magnified the hundreds of thick gold coins which were heaped inside. The sight of the coins was startling to Michael. He had held no preconceived notion of what the chest contained and now that it was opened, splashed with sunlight, each coin glittering with a thick circular life of its own, he caught his breath in wonder and surprise and unconsciously moved closer to the heavy chest as Barker set it down on the countertop.

"Doubloons," Barker said. "Spanish doubloons. They are worth a fortune, sir." His eyes met Diane's over the open chest. There was a fine sheen of sweat on Diane's forehead and her upper lip. The old man's mouth was twitching slightly.

His hand on the open lid of the chest had begun to tremble.

"Would you like to examine one, sir?" he asked, but he did not deliver the words to Michael. He spoke to Diane, and his eyes held hers in a steady gaze now, and she smiled back at him in a frozen, sleepy-eyed way, her eyes meeting the old man's over the open box like a challenge.

Michael picked up one of the coins. It was heavy and thick, inscribed with Spanish lettering and the name of a monarch and a seventeenth century date. The chest was full of them. He

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wanted suddenly to pick them up and let them trickle through his open fingers.

"Would you like that coin, sir?" Barker said. There was a tremor in the old man's voice now.

"It's very beautiful," Michael whispered.

"It is very very beautiful, sir. Would you like it, sir?"

"How—how much is it?"

"There is a price, sir."

"What's the price?"

"What do you think it is worth, sir?"

"I have no idea."

"It is worth a great deal, sir."

"Well, how much?"

"Make me an offer, sir."

"I told you," Michael said, annoyed, "I don't know how much it's worth." He had become irritated suddenly and irrationally, irritated by the old man's trembling hand and by the frozen smile on Diane's face, and by the dust and suffocating heat of the shop, and the rush of noise outside, and irritated too by the sight of the gleaming coins in the old wooden chest.

"I will accept a reasonable offer, sir," Barker persisted.

"I told you I—"

"For two coins then, sir? Would you make an offer for two of the coins?"

"If I don't know what one is worth, how can I—?"

"Three, sir? Will you barter for three?"

He looked into the old man's eyes, and he saw what was there, and the old man's meaning cracked sharply into his mind, and he felt a sudden chill.

"A dozen coins, sir?" Barker said, and he leaned closer, and his eyes turned to Diane, coveted her in one swift glance, and somehow assured her, assured her of something certain which was about to happen, and Michael realised with a sudden shock that he wanted those coins, he desired those coins in the wooden chest, he wanted them desperately, and it was then that his eyes narrowed and the dust in the shop took on a new and different smell.

"Two dozen coins, sir? I am willing to trade. I am willing to barter."

Michael held the single doubloon in his hand and he looked at the glittering heap of coins and he felt suddenly weak. He began shaking his head, the ticking of the clocks loud in his ears, the dust motes recklessly climbing the golden shafts, Diane blonde and smiling her cold fixed evil smile, the old man leaning forward and wheezing heavily, anxiously awaiting his answer, evil, and the

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stench of evil in his own nostrils, suffocating him. He reached for Diane's elbow blindly, and he dropped the doubloon on to the gleaming pile of coins and shoved past the old man.

Barker reached out as if to stop them, and his thick fingers travelled the length of Diane's naked arm caressingly as she rushed past recoiling from his touch, and went swiftly down the steps into the street, Michael following behind her, the expensive camera swinging from his neck.

They stopped on the pavement. The sun was still intense. Behind them the steps rose to the ugly pink wall and the beckoning red arrow. His hand shook as he fumbled for the cigarettes in the pocket of his white shirt.

"He recognised us," Diane whispered, and suddenly she began to shiver.

"Yes," Michael answered quickly, taking her elbow. His eyes would not meet hers. "He knew we were tourists."

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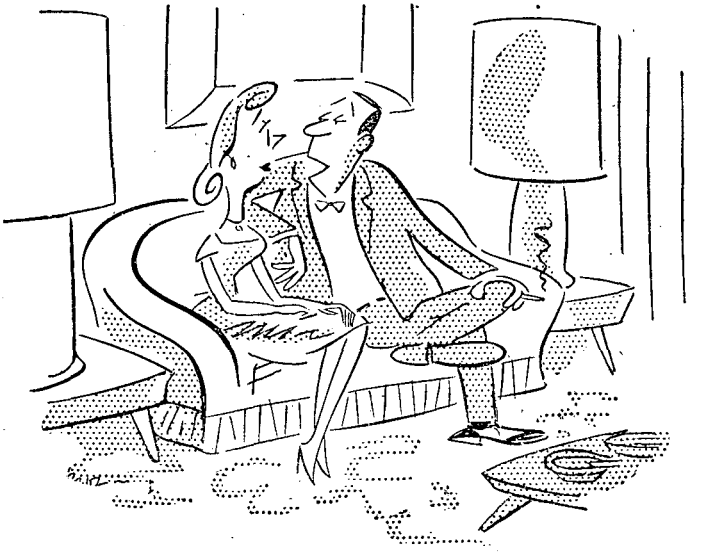

"There's something I've been wanting to tell you for a long time, Elsie. We've been seeing each other night after night for almost three years now; we've learnt each other's little foibles and peculiarities and in many ways it's been just as if we were married. Now I don't know how you feel about me but, and I say this with all sincerity, I'm fed up."

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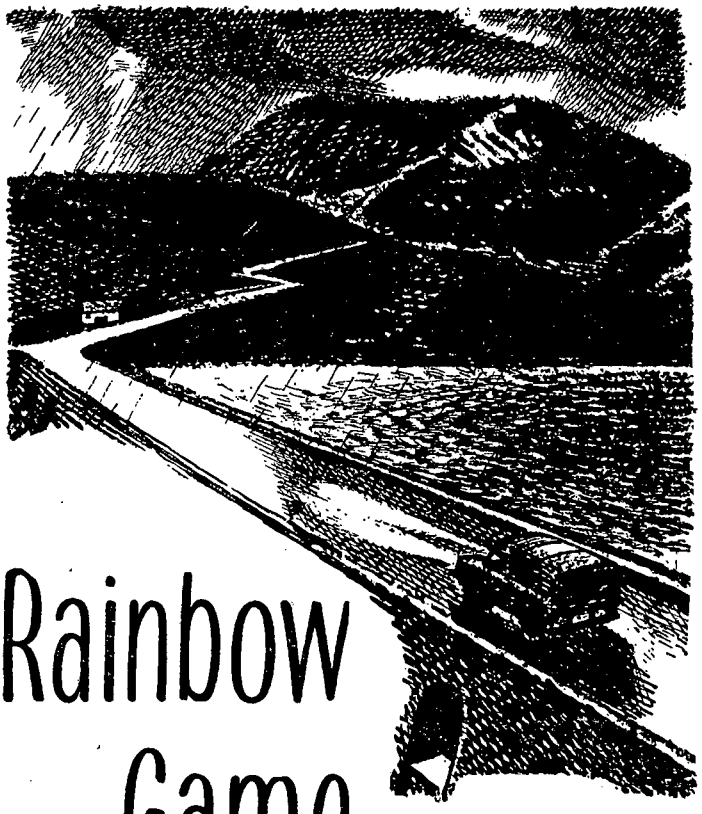

Rainbow Game

By DAVID WALKER

JAMES McINVER put the rifle in its canvas cover, slung that, slung the telescope, took the stick, and out to the rain. His roses had withered at the bud; his chrysanthemums drooped in a tangle. Rain streaked the whitewash of his cottage, which some folk would call wee, but a man alone would swim in it. " Aye,

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swim," he grumbled, a steady month of rain, a fine hour or two, and now another downpour. "It is the sadness of the rain," he said, and felt a little cheered. He was a Highlander.

He backed out the brake—a sturdy jeep-thing with the four-wheel drive—and now he was ready for the hill. But a bell caught his ear, and a bicycle caught his eye. The boy stood on his pedals, swinging back and forth across the road to ease the slope.

"If you climb like yon," said James, "you'll climb into orbit round the moon. What's on your mind, then, Jock?"

John Reid recovered breath and speech. "I was feared I'd miss you, Jamie," he said. "I was for the tattie-picking, but Beefy says the fields is too wet."

"So they would be," James said, cherishing a hope that Beefy Bain's potatoes would rot in sodden ground, one good thing about the rain. But the thought was unworthy of him. "And what is Your Lordship's pleasure?" he inquired of his friend, whose face was wet and red, and now broad-grinned about "Your Lordship."

"Well, Jamie, it's like this way—I have my sandwich piece, and Mum'll no' be missing me at dinnertime, and I just thought to myself, Well, if Jamie's away up for the hinds, well mebbe . . ."

James considered the uncompleted question and the questioner, who was grand company on the hill, but . . . "But what will Mistress Sheila Reid, your mum, be saying if I send you home like a wet dish-clout?"

"Och, I'm fine," said Jock. "I'm waterproof. And look there, Jamie—it's fairing up."

The rain was less, the clouds were breaking; yes, it looked more hopeful.

"Come away then, Jock," he said. "It's a short day I'm making of it."

They drove uphill, past young Scots pine and old hill birches to the open moor. And now the sun came out—a single shaft struck down upon a gully to sparkle on peaty waterfalls, and, wonder of wonders, to change the sad brown bracken into gleaming russet. "The very same," said James McInver, Highland stalker, "the very self-same bonny colour."

"What bonny colour, Jamie?"

"Och, just a notion I had," James muttered. He would have few secrets from John Reid on the hill, but one secret must be that the sunlit bracken was the very self-same bonny colour as the crowning glory of Mistress Sheila Reid, Jock's widowed mother. But the sun had gone, and the colour again was dead wet bracken Yon's life, James thought. One bonny glimpse, and rain and

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sorrow. He sighed as the rain began, and his young friend glanced across to see what ailed him.

"Let's make a rhyme about Beefy just to cheer us up," Jock said, "like: *The Aberdeen Anguses stood in the rain,*
And the biggest black sausage was Beefy Bain."

James laughed. "You'll be a poet yet," he said. It was nice, if a touch awkward, that Mistress Sheila's son should have such an honest dislike of James' chief rival, that prosperous Lowland farmer and butcher. As for James himself, he was not only jealous, he would bear a grudge against Bain to his dying day. When he got sixpence a pound better price from another butcher last month for the Laird's venison, Bain dropped veiled hints that McInver was selling deer for himself and pocketing the proceeds. A man might have faults, and a man might have been in some troubles sometimes, but to sell the Laird's beasts . . .

They reached the hill loch, and crossed the bridge over the sluice where spate-water thundered. The wind was south-east, and they had to make a wide sweep by north and west to come back upwind. It was a short climb to the corrie where he knew a parcel of hinds would be sheltering.

James shot two hinds, and dragged one down, assisted by his manful companion. They ate their sandwiches in the car, and at one o'clock went up for the other beast. They would be home before three, a good day's work in the rain; but the work must be done, fair weather or foul, for red deer were too plentiful.

It grew murky as they climbed the second time. The sky closed in, the wind dropped to nothing, and then the thunderplout began. It was so fierce that a man could not see, could not feel, could not believe anything but rain and storm. James cursed himself for bringing the boy, but he found shelter for Jock under a ledge at the wall of the corrie, and crouched outside himself.

He told Jock stories to keep the thunder and the lightning from his mind—stories of Canada and other lands where Jamie had passed his wandering years; he told him old tales of Dunlogan where the Highlands and the Lowlands meet. And then the storm passed and the rainbow came. It came down to spread its band of colours on the heather twenty yards from them.

"There lies your treasure, Jock," he said. "Away for a spade and dig it up."

"What kind of a treasure, Jamie?" Not believing, nor quite disbelieving, because, of course, John Reid knew that Highland legend.

"Diamonds and rubies and gold doubloons," James said. And pearls for Mistress Sheila's bonny throat, he thought with melancholy with a dream of hidden treasures.

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"If your share's a million, Jamie, what'll you do with it? Will you buy a Leopard car like Beefy's?"

Queer, James thought. He ay comes back to Beefy. "No such thing," he said. "I'll away to an army surplus dump, and get me some old Sherman tank, and I'll have a wee accidental smash against Beefy's plush-lined Leopard car and chew it to a scrap-iron heap, and syne . . ."

Syne, he thought . . . Syne I'll draw up at Dunlogan sweetie-shop, post office, general store, and I'll open the hatch and out I'll pop, and in the braw widow will squeeze with me, and off we'll drive on a tracked honeymoon by Sherman tank to Greenock for to board an ocean liner in the Royal Suite. "Fair daft," he said about his demented self. "Come on, Jock," he said.

By three o'clock they were down at the brake, which was the Laird's name for that handy vehicle—no Sherman tank, but twice the match of any rich Leopard saloon on any hill. They would be home in half an hour.

Alas, they were not. That fierce downpour had caused a minor landslide across the hill road. James got out his spade and dug a way through. It rained steadily again as darkness fell. Young Jock's teeth were chattering.

James put some water in his tin cup, took out the half bottle he kept for emergencies, and poured a small tot. "Here," he said, "a wee dram of Highland wine for medicine to warm you up."

"Gosh!" said Jock, shuddering. "Yon's terrible stuff." He shook his head against the taste of the terrible stuff. "Would you be liking it?"

"In strict moderation mostly, yes, I would," James said. "And so might you one day. It brings the warmth to a man's sad heart." He had a dram himself, but neat.

They drove to the stalker's cottage, added one bicycle to two hinds in the back of the brake, and went on down to Dunlogan post office, close to the floods beside the bridge. It is not a safe place for them to be, James thought. If the loch should ever break out at the sluice . . .

"Thanks, Jamie," said John Reid, who had stopped shivering, warmed by Highland wine. "Thanks a million billion for the best day ever in all my life. I'd like fine to see yon Beefy try to drag a big beast from off the hill the way you can." With which cryptic compliment and reference to their mutual enemy he wheeled his bicycle to the porch, and James continued down the glen to sell the Laird's beasts to another butcher.

"Will I?" he said aloud on his way back in the rain. "Or will I not?" Would he or would he not stop by for a postage

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stamp or a quarter of jujube mints at the hand of the postmistress, widowed Mistress Sheila?

But he would, of course. It was like a sweet-painful disease of the heart with him just to see her, so kind and so gentle in her woman's beauty that was lost to man. "My Hamish," she would sometimes say, and always be thinking, her eyes far off, her heart still with Hamish, dead these nine years. She was a widow of thirty-two.

He went in to find her at the counter. His heart was not far off like hers, but very much here, and it stopped a beat or two as usual. "Grand night, Mistress Sheila," he said, adding hastily, "A wee thing damp all day," to correct some sense into his daftness.

Sad yet serene, she would agree with him. Not so. "*A wee thing damp all day!*" she said in a new tone altogether. "The worst weather yet, and you take my Jock without the asking, and you bring him back soaked through and through."

"But Mistress Sheila . . ." he began.

"And that's not all the worst of it—him a wee laddie not turned twelve, half drunk with the smell of whisky on his breath . . ." Such anger from Mistress Sheila Reid, who never spoke an unkind word to man nor beast. But now her bonny green eyes were fiery flashes, her bonny hair like the sunlit bracken tossed. "Corrupter of youth!" Her bonny bosom heaved.

The words were insulting, but he felt no insult, only wonder at Mistress Sheila aflame at last. "Jock's teeth were fair chattering, and us stuck on the hill, Mistress Sheila," he explained. "Yon was the best thing I could do, like medicine, like the doctor ordered. Och, Mistress Sheila!"

"*Och, Mistress Sheila!* You and your fancy Highland tongue, and that's not all—teaching him rhymes about a decent God-fearing farmer and butcher, an abstainer too, an elder of the Kirk—yon what he told me in his bath."

"No such thing!"

At the thought of Bain, Jamie's Highland temper stirred. *The Aberdeen Anguses stood in the rain, And the biggest black sausage was Beefy Bain.* But he could not tell Mistress Sheila that her son, his staunch ally, was the author of that poem.

James grew vexed and still more vexed as he stared at this grand new passionate Mistress Sheila, not a skimpy woman, not by any means—a grand armful of a woman, good enough to eat, as the saying went, so plump to share a stalker's cottage, and poor Jamie groaned; and then he growled to think that it was Beefy's free sirloin steaks had helped to condition her to this perfection. Aye, and he wooed Mistress Sheila with the choicest cuts, that

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over-Beefy Bain. But what could an honest stalker give to woo in competition?

". . . Eh?" he said, because she was accusing him again.

"And telling him stories about the young laird and the shepherd's daughter—poor broken-hearted lassie out with her babe to die in the snow. What kind of a tale is yon for wee boys?"

"It's an old tale from two hundred years back that every wee boy in the glen hears in his mother's arms. But you wouldn't understand, being just a Lowlander, Mistress Sheila," he said with darkening politeness.

"I'm not just a Lowlander. I'm a Fifer from the Kingdom."

"Aye," he said, resentful now. "And how would a Fifer ken the sorrows of the hills? And how would you ken that I told yon old tale to keep Jock's mind off the lightning and thunder?"

"That's no excuse to put notions into an innocent bairn's head about getting lassies into trouble. I never did like to believe what I heard about you, James McInver, strong drink and loose women all round the Highlands and round the world, and your soft *Mistress Sheila* talk, but now I believe it, every word."

Ah yes, he had sowed wild hill oats and danced Highland flings in the carefree days before he settled down last year to be a sober stalker, speechless suitor of Mistress Sheila. But now—it was a grand release from piety, sobriety, from this time of reverent wooing so unlike James McInver himself, more like some softie wee Lowland or sassenach kind of man—now his heart swelled free, and his temper broke.

"Aye," he said, or shouted at her in his wrath, "you believe it every word, so you can believe this too, you Mistress Mrs. Sheila Reid, you living with the past, you plumping up the present with buckshee undercuts. *Fancy Highland tongue and Mistress Sheila, getting lassies into trouble.* Well now, I'll tell you something: I'd like fine for you to be my mistress and to get you into trouble . . ."

She drew in breath. She put both hands to cover her face, which grew ashen, the bonny colour gone, her bosom stilled—bonny as twin heather hills—and then she sighed a long breath out, and the colour came again to double-flood her cheeks.

"Och, Hamish!" she murmured to her long lost man. Then she took her hands from off her eyes, and they were wet, and she stretched a bonny arm to point the road of his dismissal. "Go!" she said. "Never darken this door again."

What could an honest stalker do but go? He went out to the pelting night to mount his muddy brake as a sleek Leopard car drew up, and from it climbed or heaved a fat man with a fat man's puffing, in his hand a brown paper package such as butchers use

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to wrap choice cuts. He hastened at a fat man's shuffling trot to the door of Dunlogan post office.

James drove homewards to his lonely cottage through the rain. What could have taken him? What a thing for a decent man to say to a virtuous mother and widowed wife, pure as the snow on high Ben Logan—*to be my mistress, to get you into trouble.* Jamie groaned.

He ran along the swollen river, and past the farmer-butcher's house, and on by the Laird's dark castle. It's all him is to blame, he thought about his laird who worked down London making the money to keep this old place going. The Laird was none too bad a chap, but restless from the city, ay striding on for dividends.

"Come on, Jamie," he said. They had been waiting for a muckle stag to settle.

"Patience, man!" whispered Jamie.

So they waited again behind the shoulder in the warm September sun; but the Laird's mind always had to be busy with something or other, and he said, or whispered, "I see you've whitewashed the cottage and made a damned nice garden; quite domesticated you're becoming, Jamie, after all the years you trod the tiles." James just grunted, on his guard, because he had spotted the Laird out snooping last Sunday afternoon when Mistress Sheila and young Jock had a nice cup of tea in the cottage with him.

"It has been my observation," said the Laird, "that the gayer the dog, the worse the cropper the gay dog takes. Breaks hearts right and left, and slides out with a kindly smile. And then Wham! one day, a goddess on a pedestal, and where is the gay dog now but kneeling below a pair of ankles above ten holy untouchable toes. You take some advice, Jamie?"

Jamie had it so badly by then that he was seeing on the heather above his eyes the shapely ankles of Mistress Sheila Reid above ten holy toes that he had never seen and far less touched. "I'll consider it," he said about the Laird's advice, not best pleased with the Laird.

"The best of widows might be lulled into second marriage with comfort and beefsteak and prosperous cars. In other words, she might put up with that corpulent farmer for the sake of the boy and an easy life. But you can't offer any such blandishments. All you can offer is yourself. But look at you, like a lovelorn hummel. Go and snaffle the girl; pinch her, do worse; but shake her back to life."

James McInver had been so outraged by his employer, by this mocking of his reverent love for Mistress Sheila, that he stood up on the hill and scared the stag and every beast for miles.

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A lovelorn hummel, a broody stag that bore no antlers . . .

But that was two long months ago, in a fine September. It rained all through October, fifteen inches where the average was three, and it still was raining in November. Down England way and those flat places, there had been no such floods within living memory. Here the Logan stormed from the loch through the glen to the Lowland valley, but there was no bad flooding—nor would there be, so long as the sluice-dam held at the foot of the loch.

" Forty days and forty nights," said James McInver. Yes, the fortieth day had come. He took down his Bible to read the Book of Genesis while eating porridge with salt and with rich cream from Jessie his cow. He closed the Bible upon Noah in the ark, a story unfinished, as this story was unfinished.

There was a lull, and then the rain began again to slat against his cottage windows. He felt a sharpness of foreboding, a certainty that it would never end until an inscrutable will had been satisfied. Now the knock on the door was like the knock of fate, and Jamie started. But the visitor was young Jock Reid.

" You shouldn't be out in this weather, Jock," said James. " And forbye, your mum wouldn't want you to be here." A week had passed since last Saturday when his fancy Highland tongue had run amok, and Mistress Sheila, morally outraged, had forbidden him ever to darken her door again. " Your mum wouldn't like it, Jock," he said.

" I ken yon fine," said Jock. " What was it you were shouting at Mum to make her say I'm no' to see you? I says to her why, and all she says is you're a bad lude man. What's lude? "

Lude was . . . " Like rude," he said. Och aye, he thought, I was desperate rude, but that damned Laird put me up to it, the Laird's to blame, and then I blew my top with lewd ideas. ". . . Eh, Jock? "

" I says: Mum's away shopping with Beefy in his Leopard car, and I'm supposed to be minding the shop; but I just locked the door and I came away because the boys at school was saying yesterday that the next thing Mum'll be married to Beefy Bain."

Jock Reid looked down at his tackety boots, and then at Jamie. " I don't remember my dad," he said, " and if my mum's to marry Beefy, I'll run away and steal and kill, I will, I promise."

" You'll do no such thing," said James McInver. " You'll be a true son to your mum." He said that, and was sore at heart. " It's time I was up the hill," he said, " and time you were minding the post office like your mother told you. Be a man then, Jock."

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"I'm no' a man," said Jock, "and I thought you were my pal."

"Go on, then, Your Lordship," he said, patting His Lordship's shoulder, thinking he'd better get away from here before two pals, not one, would be in tears. "And another thing," he said briskly, "there was two more inches rain in the night, and the loch'll be higher still—I'm none too happy about yon house of yours. If you see a quick rise come down the Logan, get out of it."

"Beefy was wanting Mum to move, but she said it was her own man's house, and there she would stay; so he says, well, he has the boat to rescue us, and then she drives away off with Beefy. Mum's queer these days, Jamie, she's not like herself at all."

Yes, he thought. The sad widow feels queer, facing marriage with a fat second husband, and the first breathed his last in that same house. Jock's father, Hamish Reid, was a decent chap, killed in a tractor accident.

James picked up his rifle. "There's a good laddie," he said; so they parted.

The rut was long past, but a few stags still roared about the hill. Down here it rained; up there at two thousand feet and higher, it snowed. The clouds lifted just after twelve, blue sky showed through, the wind veered south, and it seemed that at last the weather was breaking.

Forty days, he thought. There is an end to everything, to rain, to love, to a widow's sorrow. He shot a hind and a worthless young stag. They must be killed to keep the stock down to wintering numbers. If not, the deer would raid Lowland farms, and the first to squeal would be Beefy Bain.

But the rain was not over. Now a warm plout came to melt the snow. It rained like the tropics where Jamie had wandered. There is no end to it, he thought, as he had thought so many times in these last weeks. No end to rain and love and sorrow.

He dragged the beasts down. The dim day was over, and the brake would not start. He spent a cursing hour drying plugs in driving rain, and almost gave it up, and then she fired. The wiper made no impression on the flooding windscreen. He bumped and skidded a half-blind way through darkness to the loch, and round the foot of that to cross above the sluice.

There was a great sound of water here, a wilder tumble than he had heard before; and the narrow bridge . . .

All these forty days and this fortieth night the swollen loch had leaned against its containing wall, storming over the spillway, finding a harnessed course. The dam had held a hundred years, since first the level of the loch was raised. But these were the floods of a century, and to the last warm rain was added a load of

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snow. Now the loch lipped the wall itself, and now the dam was breaking up.

Standing out in the rain, James saw with the headlights through the rain, and he saw the jet-arch of water where the wall was breaching. It was at the far end of the sluice, and already the bridge was undermined. It canted, canted a little more . . . Beyond that bridge were three miles of winding road to reach the lower glen.

Until lately in the paralysing throes of love Jamie had never havered or dilly-dallied about the crossing of any bridge of any kind in all his life. He did not hesitate now about the crossing of this perilous bridge. He took it fast, slewed at the farther end, skidded, tipped, recovered, and was on his way as he heard Niagara break behind him.

He knew what that meant—it meant a body of water one mile long by half a mile wide by ten foot deep would race down the glen to form a loch where the glen flattened out.

And a boat? The Laird's only boat was in a boathouse in the path of flood. There was one other, and that belonged to Bain the farmer, a light aluminium kind of thing with a trailer of its own that a jeep would haul to a loch for the fishing. Bain had even told that obstinate Mistress Sheila that, if needs be, he would rescue her.

"Damned daft sentimental crater," shouted James in the swaying brake. It was not hopeless love that he felt towards Mistress Sheila now, but a strong vindictive rage. Yet that rage was lost in awe by an awesome sight as he swung at a bend to see that the torrent was racing him.

Now floods just below the road to the right; now lights just above the road to the left. Bain was too grand a farmer-butcher altogether to live at a steading with his beasts. He lived in a fine house, separate.

Jamie skidded to a halt, jumped out, and wasted no time. "I'm taking your boat," he said to the apoplectic Bain in the rain. "With all your beef you'd sink it. Out of my way." But Bain paid no heed. He went on unlashing the boat from its trailer.

So Jamie went up to him, and it was murder. He spun Beefy by the shoulder and he socked him with a bonny left. "Take that," he said, "just for your fat self." As Beefy toppled, he socked him back with a bonny right. "And take that," he said, "for saying I pocketed the money for the Laird's red deer you tried to cheat the Laird about." It was a grand feeling of murder, or slightly less. Beefy Bain lay down, asleep in the rain.

James seized the boat from off its trailer, and then remembered certain first-aid supplies, dashed to the brake, back to the boat.

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What was the dragging of a wee metal boat to a stalker who dragged muckle beasts off the hill?

He had it down to the road, and over the fence at the brink of flood, and he held the painter and climbed the fence and was aboard in half a jiffy. He spun out there in darkness, very much alone on the roaring flood, but too much happening, too much to do to feel the loneliness of fear.

It was dark, but not full dark, for a moon hid up above the rain. He tried to row, to keep clear of the flotsam, whole trees that jostled with him in the torrent at fifteen miles an hour, a dead sheep too. And on the river Jamie had a thought, or a feeling more, that had grown with him all this troubled time: That it was autumn, the season for rain and death and sorrow, not the season for growth and love and laughter.

It was a sad black thought; but there was a light ahead, one dim glimmer to the left, and before him the dark mass of the bridge that took the road across the River Logan. He sensed something else—a slowing now, a quietening of the flood. The reason was perfectly clear to him, as all things were perfectly clear—the trees, the undergrowth, the pale dead sheep, the mangled boathouse—all piled into that bridge, below it, above it, astride it to dam the flood.

He heaved on his oars, forced his way out of the run, away from the peril of the bridge into the lee of the hill. In against the hill there stood Dunlogan post office and sweetie shop, with candlelight showing at one window close above water level below the roof.

James shipped one oar and caught a drainpipe by that window. The rain had stopped for a thousandth false promise in forty days and nights of rain. The flood was now silent but for a heaving, thrashing, splashing from the direction of the bridge.

"Open up!" he shouted.

The window was opened above his head. Inch by inch his head was rising to window level where Mistress Sheila and Jock now leaned. "You damned obstinate lassie!" he shouted at her. "Drowned out with memories, and what about wee Jock? Can ye no' think of him?"

For a brief time, half a minute or so, Jamie McInver gave Sheila Reid a piece of his mind. That piece of his mind roared out as fiercely and strongly as loch water when a dam is breached. "Get into the boat," he commanded. "Hurry up!"

Mistress Sheila's bonny face was pale, and her bonny full lips were trembling. "Och, I canna, Jamie," she quavered to him. "I'm feared."

"It's stopped rising, Jamie," said young Jock, who did not

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seem to be afraid, but did seem to be seeing a kind of a joke. Yes, the boat no longer rose to bring Jamie's eyes to equal terms with the wild green eyes of Mistress Sheila. "Would we all not be safer in the house?" continued Jock.

"Mebbe so," he conceded. "Here, take the painter, and tie it tight to something solid."

"O.K. now, Jamie."

He climbed in to find the painter tied tight to a solid iron leg of Mistress Sheila's widow's bed. "It wasn't your door I never darkened again," he said.

Mistress Sheila looked at him and looked away. It's mebbe me she's feared of, James thought. Mebbe a man is worse than a flood. Her eyes came to him again, and he gave her a smile, and she smiled back, so shy and so bonny, feared of him.

"I've nothing to offer," she said, "not even a bite of a biscuit to eat. The flood came so quick, and the shop is ruined. Och, what will I do?" She hung her head, and the bonny hair framed two tears that swelled and slithered and slid down her cheeks; and James was strangely strong and sad and happy.

"Never mind then, Sheila my lass," he said, a new man altogether, James McInver, his own man now. There was a glass on the washstand, a carafe. He went over, followed by two pairs of eyes, took the first-aid, half a bottle of Highland wine from his inside pocket, poured it out and filled the glass and took it back to her and put it in her hand and said, "Take a wee sup, it'll do you good." She drank obediently.

"Flood's dropping," said Jock at the window. "It's down four foot. You'll never get into yon boat now, Jamie."

That meant that the bridge had gone, or the flotsam had cleared itself. "I'm not in any too daft a hurry to get back in yon boat," said James McInver.

The last time she blushed was in moral outrage; and so would have any respectable woman. But now she blushed, and caught herself smiling, and quelled the smile. Sheila finished her drink. "It's ten o'clock, away past your bedtime, Jock," she said.

"The water's stopped dropping," Jock said, "and the boat's fair hanging, and Jamie can't go, so where will he sleep?"

"In your bed," she said. "You come in with me. Now hurry, Jock." The boy went to undress.

The picture of her husband, Hamish Reid, stood on the dresser. James had something to say, and carefully. He looked at the photograph, and said, "Your Hamish was a good man, Sheila. And so will young Jock be a good man like him."

"Thank you," she said. "Thanks, Jamie." She stared at him, not shyly as she had done this evening, not absently and

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kindly from a castle of her memories, not in horror of a bad lewd man, but warmly and strongly for him alone.

Jock came back in his pyjamas. "Here, I'll tuck you up," his mother said. Which she did. And Jamie said good night to the boy.

"Are you sleepy?" he said to her. "Or will you keep me company with my dram?"

"I am," she said with a bonny yawn. "But I will." She even accepted another herself. He sat on Jock's bed, and she on Jock's chair; and they were silent until she said, "Tell us some stories. Tell us about the places you've been." She smiled at a thought, which might be about an angered remark of hers about Jamie McInver with strong drink and loose women all round the Highlands and round the world.

So he told her of those places of his wandering years. Being a gentleman, like all good Highlanders, he told the romance without the romances. "They were grand times I had," he said, seeing India and Canada and Zanzibar and many far places, and the shadows of some lesser ladies.

"Yon's what I wouldn't be understanding," Mistress Sheila said, "how you could come back to just being a stalker again after all your adventures."

"There was a lassie I remembered," Jamie said. "I saw her the once, and she wasn't mine. But I remembered."

"Good night then, Jamie," Sheila said.

"Could I not get tucked up too?" he said.

"Tucking up's for wee boys," she said to him, and she went away, and Jamie took off his jacket and boots and went to bed. He was hungry, with nothing but a piece since breakfast. The moon was shining beyond his window. The flood raced on below his window. But the weather was turning clear and cold. Forty days and nights were over.

Jamie was happy. He was happier still when she tiptoed in "So my big boy would like to be tucked up too," she said to him. She kissed him on each cheek, and on the brow, and once for a long time on the lips. "My bad good laddie," she said. "Sleep tight."

So Jamie slept, but he had a dream. The storm was ended on the hill, and a rainbow came to spread its coat of all God's colours on a stalker's cottage. A treasure lay there. "*Not diamonds and rubies and gold doubloons*," said Jamie in his sleep. "*But life and love and joy after trouble.*"

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THE 2.20 FROM DINAS

Start running punctual and—
where are you?

BY E. L. MALPASS

NO ONE has ever satisfactorily explained how a single-decker Welsh bus could have got itself into orbit. Shooting up over the pass a bit too carefree, and becoming airborne? Caught by a sudden gust of wind? A combination of the two? No one seems to know. But the fact remains that get itself into orbit it did. And a fine old fuss there was about it, too.

Here are the known facts. On 10th July, the bus, the 2.20 from Dinas to Llangrwl, left Dinas at two-thirty-five as usual. Aboard, apart from the crew, were Mrs. Megan Thomas and her five-year-old son Cadwallader; pretty little Morfydd Owen; Mr. Stanley Hayball and Miss Ethel Yates, hikers from Birmingham; Price the Provisions; and the Rev. Edwards.

Yes, the bus set out from Dinas. So much is established. Ifor Huw Evans, Propr., watched it go from the windows of the Dinas Motor Omnibus Co.

Very interested, Ifor was. For there was his garage hand, Dai Pugh, taking a tearful farewell of Morfydd Owen. Morfydd, who had until recently been Ifor's typist, but was now returning to her home town as a fully-fledged schoolteacher.

"But I am only going fifteen miles away," Morfydd was saying. "Not the end of the world, is it?"

"For me it is," Dai said wretchedly, wiping his hands on his overalls preparatory to a last embrace. "You will not be remembering a mere garage hand when you are lording it over the Mixed Infants of Llangrwl."

"Silly boy," said Morfydd. Though she could not help wondering whether, now she had qualified as a schoolteacher, poor little Dai was quite the man for her.

A nice boy of course. But perhaps in the new world she was entering there might be boys equally nice, and with far more to offer.

The conductor rang his bell.

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"Good-bye, Dai," said Morfydd, smiling from the bottom step.

"Good-bye, Morfydd." He sought to enfold her in his arms. But he was too late. She was already up the bus steps, and the bus was away. And Morfydd Owen waving, unkissed, from the window. And Dai, on the pavement, knowing in his heart that Morfydd was leaving him as surely as she was leaving Dinas.

So the bus set out for Llangrwl.

But it never reached there! Somewhere, on those fifteen miles of mountain roads, it disappeared from the earthly scene.

The first intimation that all was not well came when a Mr. Isaiah Roberts, landlord of The Traveller's Joy, rang up the Dinas Motor Omnibus Co. to ask what had happened to their damn bus.

"Left here all right," said Ifor. "Two-thirty-five, on the dot."

"It's supposed to leave at two-twenty."

"Who says so?"

"Your timetable."

"Don't want to take too much notice of those old timetables," Ifor said, reasonably. "Start running punctual and where are you? People get left behind, isn't it? Very exasperating for one and all."

Exasperated is what Mr. Roberts sounded. "But it's over an hour late, now. And me due in Llangrwl ten minutes ago for a meeting of the Licensed Victuallers' Association."

Shaken, Ifor Evans was. But not showing it, mind. "Mustn't expect too much on these Welsh roads, must we now?" he said, very conciliatory. "Not on the M1, are we?"

"And what are you going to do about it?" Tendentious, Mr. Roberts sounded.

"What do you want me to do? Send out a sheriff's posse, is it?"

No sense of humour, that Isaiah. He banged down the receiver. Very uncivil.

Dropped the mask, now, Ifor did. "Dai Pugh," he bellowed. "Leap on your bicycle and scour the countryside between here and The Traveller's Joy. The two-twenty to Llangrwl has failed to complete her mission."

Paled, did Dai. For the two-twenty carried, for him, a cargo more precious than jewels. Though Morfydd Owen was, as he feared, departing out of his life, he still loved her dearly.

Already, even as with trembling fingers he fastened his trouser clips, he was seeing her lying in some dreadful ravine, or beset by robbers, or being whisked off to Emergency Ward 10. But

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even his imagination, luckily for him, did not visualise the awful truth—that Morfydd Owen was already qualifying for the title of " First Woman to Enter Space."

" Where we going, Mam? " inquired little Cadwallader when his child mind grasped the fact that the green earth was falling away at a rate of knots.

Where indeed? Megan Thomas spoke sharply to the conductor, demanding an explanation. But nonplussed, the conductor was. A good man, mind; knew his job. But out of his depth in this particular instance. Fingered his ticket-punch nervously. Peered out of the window. Went and consulted the driver. " Where we going? " he echoed Cadwallader.

" Damned if I know, boy," said the driver. " But something very untoward has happened, if you ask me."

Immersed in the *Dinas Advertiser*, was the Rev. Edwards. Now he put down his paper, folded it, and glanced idly out of the window.

Looked again, eyes starting from his head. " God bless my immortal soul," he cried.

" Never mind your immortal soul," said Megan Thomas tartly. " Here we are traversing the heavens at the very moment when we should be running into Llangrwl bus station. And no one doing the first thing about it."

Stung, the conductor was. " What you expect me to do? " he inquired, bitter. " Radio Flying Control at London Airport, is it? "

" Mutual recriminations will get us nowhere," boomed the Rev. Edwards.

" It's all very well," commented Mr. Hayball from the back seat. " But Eth and me wanted to be at the Youth Hostel before dark."

Morfydd Owen was silent. But she looked down at the fast-disappearing earth, and it seemed to her that she would never see her Dai again. And though half an hour ago she had regarded this possibility with fortitude, it now filled her with dismay. Quietly she began to weep . . .

Dai, meanwhile, was pedalling furiously on the road. Not a sign of the bus. He passed The Traveller's Joy. At last he caught up Mr. Roberts, walking very dogged towards Llangrwl.

" Afternoon, Mr. Roberts," he called, polite, as he shot past. His spirits were rising. He had seen no sign of an accident. Therefore Mr. Roberts must have been mistaken. He would find the bus safe and sound in Llangrwl, and his dear Morfydd quietly having tea in her own home.

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But disappointment awaited him. A restive queue of people in the bus station, waiting to be transported to Dinas. And when he went to Morfydd's house, all he found was Morfydd's mam, working herself up proper . . .

Getting dark, now. The conductor switched on the lights. The beleaguered passengers peered out of the windows. Little to be seen, only a few lone stars, and the distant earth brooding in her shroud of mist. Megan Thomas sat tight-lipped, nursing the sleeping Cadwallader. Driver and conductor peered ahead into nothingness. On the back seat Stan Hayball embraced his Eth. Morfydd thought of Dai. The Rev. Edwards, standing at the front, looked at his forlorn flock.

"What about a verse or two of *Cwm Rhondda*?" he suggested hopefully.

They looked at him, sullen. His heart sank. If the Welsh found the situation too desperate for singing, then the situation, he realised, must be desperate indeed.

But suddenly they were roused from their lethargy. Something was approaching, faster, faster, a tearing hurrying blur that was past and gone in a moment, followed by a great rush of sound. They waved frantically. But the jet aircraft was already miles away, swinging down to the darkening earth.

"It passed me at fifty thousand feet, sir. It was climbing steadily."

Group Captain Llewelyn Jones, Officer Commanding R.A.F. Station, Dinas, looked keenly at the Flying Officer who had burst so unceremoniously into his office. "And what did it look like, Broughtons? Some sort of rocket?"

Flying Officer Broughtons shuffled his feet. "Well, actually, sir, it looked like—like a bus. A single-decker," he elaborated.

Daggers, the Group Captain looked. "Broughtons," he said silkily. "Didn't they teach you at Cranwell that buses are earth-bound creatures? Aeroplanes fly, Broughtons. Buses crawl."

Very pale, Broughtons was. But determined. "It *was* a bus, sir. They'd got the lights on. There were people inside. Waving."

Like gimlets, the Station Commander's eyes. "Did you see the indicator board?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what did it say? Mystery Tour?" Oh, very caustic, that Group Captain.

But Broughtons stood his ground. "No, sir. It said Llangrwl."

Llewelyn Jones sat back in his chair. "I see. So you met

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a bus at fifty thousand feet. All lit up. Full of people waving as you went past." Suddenly he crouched forward. "Broughtons, if I thought there were anything in Queen's Regulations to cover this, I'd have you court-martialled. But I know there isn't," he ended sadly.

"I tried to read the registration number, sir. But it was getting dark." He waited. But his commanding officer appeared to have forgotten him. He saluted, and left the presence, very crestfallen . . .

Time passed. The bus climbed, and went quietly into orbit. Time passed. The Rev. Edwards' pulpit remained empty. And so did the arms of Dai Pugh. How could they be otherwise, when his beloved was circling the Poles at three-and-a-quarter-hour intervals, regular as clockwork?

Time passed. Everyone said, "Pity about Megan Thomas, isn't it," as though they didn't really think it was a pity at all; as, indeed, they didn't.

LOCAL BUS DISAPPEARS

announced the *Dinas Advertiser*. But the London papers ignored the whole affair.

Ifor Evans reported his loss to the police. But they only tut-tutted. "Lost a bus, is it. Very careless." That was their attitude. Now if there'd been a good old accident, they could have measured up the road and taken an interest. But losing a bus! People were always losing things. You'd be surprised, they said.

So it seemed, for a time, that the whole affair would be written off as one of those unexplained mysteries, like the *Marie Celeste*. Then, things began to happen . . .

But what about the voyagers? you will be asking.

Well, the Rev. Edwards had taken command. "Our position," he said, "is somewhat analagous to that of a castaway on a desert island. Now what does such a person do? He signals his position by lighting bonfires or hoisting a flag on a palm tree. And he tries to ensure a supply of food."

"Can't go lighting bonfires on this bus," the conductor said firmly. "Contrary to the Company's Regulations."

"Of course not," agreed the minister. "No, we have another way of signalling our position. The driver must sound his horn continuously."

Gave him a look, the driver did. "Where you think we are?" he asked rudely. "Dinas High Street?"

"Do as I say, driver." Very stern, the reverend gentleman was.

So the driver peep-peeped as though he were edging his way

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through a herd of cows, instead of hurtling through empty space. "Thank you," the Rev. Edwards said courteously.

"Secondly, we must pool and ration our supplies of food, if any." He looked at Price the Provisions, who was nursing a great basket. "Now, who has any food?" he asked hopefully.

Stared back did Price the Provisions, unwinking.

"Mr. Price, I think you may be able to help us here," said the Rev. Edwards.

Price shook his head. "Intended for Plas Newydd, this lot is. Paid for, too." He folded his arms protectively over the basket.

Mutinous dog, thought the Rev. Edwards, who hadn't enjoyed himself so much since reading *Treasure Island*. "What have you got in that basket, Price?" he roared.

Quelled, Mr. Price pulled out a grocery list, pushed his glasses up on his nose, and began to read. "Six loaves, four pounds butter, two pounds marge, one tin pineapple, one York ham."

"Then we are saved," cried the Rev. Edwards.

Shyly, Morfydd Owen produced a block of chocolate. Little Cadwallader sullenly handed over an apple.

"Now," said the Rev. Edwards happily, "we can devise a system of rationing."

"Anybody'd think this was a ruddy picnic," Stan Hayball said rudely. "What me and Eth want to know is, when are we getting back to terra firma?"

"That I cannot say," admitted the Rev. Edwards. "All I can do is take steps to ensure our survival until we do."

"Oh, Stan, why didn't we go to Weston like I said?" wailed Eth, uttering for the first time.

The Rev. Edwards said, "Night has fallen. We will share a little food, and then compose ourselves for sleep. Things will look brighter in the morning." A disturbing thought struck him. He addressed himself to Mr. Hayball. "Are you and the lady man and wife, sir?"

"What, me and Eth? No. Not yet, mister."

"Then it would be unseemly for you to pass the night together on the back seat," the Rev. Edwards said firmly. "I suggest the gentlemen sleep on this side, the ladies on that."

"Are you kidding?" asked Mr. Hayball, tightening his arm about his Ethel.

Ethel laid her head on his shoulder, closed her eyes. "Night, night, all," she said sleepily.

Very distressing for the Rev. Edwards, this was. A broad-minded man in many ways, but not one to stand by and see the proprieties flouted, even in Space. He said sadly, "If you

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refuse to obey my orders, young man, I shall be forced to debar you from the issue of rations."

Mr. Hayball grinned, and gave Eth a noisy kiss.

"That's O.K., mister. Me and Eth's got samwidges and a vacuum."

"Mmm," said Eth, snuggling closer.

The scene shifts now. To Downing Street, of all places.

"A telegram for you, sir. From the President of the United States," said the Prime Minister's private secretary.

The Prime Minister took it listlessly. It would need more than a telegram from the President to save him, he reflected. For the Government was tottering. Nobody loved him any more. And the Opposition was waiting eagerly to bury him.

He opened the telegram. He read:

WARMEST CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR SUPERB ACHIEVEMENT

He took off his glasses. He sat down. He looked at his private secretary. Something that was almost hope stirred within him. "Have we—er—achieved anything recently, Bracegirdle?"

"No, sir."

"Hm." The hope began to fade.

The Prime Minister summoned the Cabinet. "Gentlemen," he said. "I have received the following message from the President of the United States. 'Warmest congratulations on your superb achievement.'"

He waited. Silence. "Sounds nice and friendly," said the Home Secretary at last, feeling that something was called for.

The Prime Minister ignored this.

"Has anyone," he asked plaintively, "the faintest idea what he's talking about?"

Clearly, no one had. They doodled on their blotting pads. They shook their heads.

"Very well," sighed the Prime Minister. "I shall reply in the following terms: 'Your message, Mr. President, has given us the greatest satisfaction. We shall continue to use our best endeavours in the race that lies before us.' I think that should do the trick."

They nodded.

"In the meantime, I must ask you all to keep your ears well to the ground. I need hardly remind you that any sort of achievement at this stage might still save our bacon."

The Prime Minister rose.

"That will be all, gentlemen . . ."

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Lights were burning late in the Kremlin.

"But who put it up, Grigor Stepanovitch?"

"Hard to say, Anton Feodorovitch. Not the Americans, certainly. We should have heard about it. Not the French." He laughed. "And the British couldn't put up a toy balloon."

Anton stroked his chin. "I am not so sure. The British are a strange race. They do some very strange things, Grigor Stepanovitch."

Well, there was a situation. Alarm and despondency everywhere. Dai Pugh, still tearing up and down the Welsh hills on his bicycle, searching for his beloved. Ifor Huw Evans, lost a bus. Price the Provisions convinced Mrs. Morgan Plas Newydd would switch to the Co-op when she didn't get her groceries. The Rev. Edwards not getting a wink of sleep, too busy making sure that Birmingham couple didn't behave improper. Morfydd discovering painfully that she still loved Dai. The Americans just the teeniest bit hurt that the British had done all this without a word to them. The Russians uneasy and suspicious. The Prime Minister very irritable because he'd achieved something superb and couldn't find out what; and if he didn't find out what in just about no time, he'd be back in the Opposition. And his private secretary, Bracegirdle, suffering accordingly.

But it was Bracegirdle who got the first clue. He met his young friend Bechstein from the American Embassy. And Bechstein said, "So the Island Race has done it again. And we didn't even know you *had* a Satellite Programme."

"We have our moments," Bracegirdle said modestly. "How much have you found out?" he asked, very cunning.

"Not much. Only that it's pretty big. And you seem to have used some rather unusual metals in the construction. Steel, for instance."

"Yes," said Bracegirdle. "Yes. That is rather a feature." He hurried off to No. 10. "Sir," he said. "I've got a line on this achievement thing."

"You have?" Agog, the Prime Minister was.

"Yes, sir. They think we've put up a satellite."

"Well, I'm blowed. Whatever gave them that idea?"

"Couldn't say, sir."

Not one to let the grass grow under his feet, that Prime Minister. "Look, Bracegirdle. We may be able to make something of this. Get on to Jodrell Bank. See whether they've been picking up anything . . ."

"Well, as a matter of fact; we have," said Jodrell Bank.

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"There's something up there, all right. It's emitting a series of peeps—or poops."

"The usual thing, in fact?" said Bracegirdle.

A bit hesitant, Jodrell Bank sounded. "Well, not exactly." They became confidential. "Actually, old boy, it sounds more like one of those oldfashioned bulb motor-horns."

Bracegirdle was getting a bit tired of all this. "And what—" he asked coldly— "what do you suggest an oldfashioned bulb motor-horn would be doing in orbit?"

"We have no idea," said Jodrell Bank equally coldly. And rang off.

Bracegirdle went back to the P.M. "They're getting a series of peeps—or poops," he said.

"Must be the Russians," said the P.M. "Can't be the Americans. We should have heard. And anyway, *they* think it's us."

But then things took a grave turn. *Pravda* announced that the British had launched a satellite. Very grudging they sounded, too. Missed the bus, they had.

"So it isn't the Russians," said the P.M. He was very pale. "Then who on earth—?"

"Perhaps it *isn't* anyone on earth," Bracegirdle said, very sepulchral.

Prime Minister and private secretary looked at each other in silence. At last: "You mean—chaps from Mars or somewhere?" asked the P.M.

Bracegirdle nodded thoughtfully.

"Good lord," said the Prime Minister, sitting down very sudden. "A man of your education, thinking along those lines!"

"What other lines are there, sir?"

"I really don't know," said the Premier. "I really don't know . . ."

A fine old time the newspapers had, now. The earth was being circled by Something of which all the Great Powers were ignorant.

The only possible conclusion seemed to be that it was a reconnaissance craft from Outer Space.

"Is Big Brother Watching *You*?" asked the *Space Express*, sending a million anxious citizens hotfoot for their tranquilliser pills. The *Globe Mail* published a series of articles on "What To Do If They Land," and demanded the recall of the Home Guard. And the *Dinas Advertiser* scooped the world's headlines by announcing, "Local Flyer Encounters Lighted Spaceship Ten Miles Up."

And then, in the midst of all the excitement, the bus ran into

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Dinas Market Place at 4 p.m. on 13th July just as though nothing had happened.

Out of his office like a shot was Ifor Evans. "And where do you think you have been?" he demanded. "Not taking four days to get to Llangrwl and back, is it?"

"I am very sorry, Mr. Evans," said the driver. "But airborne we have been. And landed down again near Tunbridge Wells, very inconvenient."

"You expect—?" began Ifor. But before he could protest further he was set upon by that Mrs. Megan Thomas.

"A fine thing," she said. "Setting out for Llangrwl and finding ourselves in Outer Space. Still giddy I am from circumnavigating the globe. And when we do come down, where are we? Llangrwl? No. Tunbridge Wells." Suddenly she realised something. "Why, even now we have not reached our destination. Still in Dinas we are. Come, Cadwallader." And she made to mount the bus steps.

Restrained her, did Ifor. "This bus will not be going on to Llangrwl yet, madam. Needs an overhaul, maybe."

"Then I demand my money back."

"If you come into the office it will be refunded."

But Ifor Evans was not out of the wood yet, not by a long way. Price the Provisions coming down the steps now, steel-rimmed glasses throwing off sparks of anger, thrusting a bill for £3 5s. 7d. under Ifor's nose. "There! Used all Mrs. Morgan Plas Newydd's week's groceries in feeding your passengers." Ifor sighed.

"Come into the office, Mr. Price. I will give you a cheque."

Then the Rev. Edwards, very solemn. "A grave matter, Ifor Evans, keeping a man from his pulpit." He shook his head. "The Circuit will have something to say about this, I am thinking."

"But I still don't know what's happened," cried Ifor. "You have been to Tunbridge Wells, I gather, though why—"

"We have been a good deal farther than Tunbridge Wells," began the Rev. Edwards.

But at that moment he was brushed aside by Dai Pugh, who had hurtled up to the bus on his bicycle crying, "Morfydd."

And there was Morfydd Owen coming down the bus steps, eyes shining. "Dai," she cried. "Oh, there is glad I am—"

She stepped down into his arms. "Been doing a lot of thinking, up there," she said gravely. "Thought at one time I should never see you again, Dai bach." She laid her head on his shoulder. "Made me realise—" She looked up, kissed his cheek. "Changed my mind about that old job in Llangrwl," she said.

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"Morfydd!" But Dai's heart was too full for words. All he knew was that Morfydd had come back safe and sound, and that she still loved him. Joyfully, he clasped her to his overalls . . .

The Prime Minister paused, pen in hand. "Bracegirdle," he said thoughtfully, "before we mobilise the Air Force, just let's make sure this thing's still there. Get on to Jodrell Bank, there's a good chap . . ."

"Good lord, no," said Jodrell Bank. "The signals stopped on the thirteenth. Didn't anyone tell you, old boy?"

"Sir," said Bracegirdle, "the signals ceased on the thirteenth."

The Prime Minister put down his pen. "And how do you interpret that?"

"Well, sir, I suppose they've landed; or perhaps," he suggested with gloomy inspiration, "perhaps they've shot off home."

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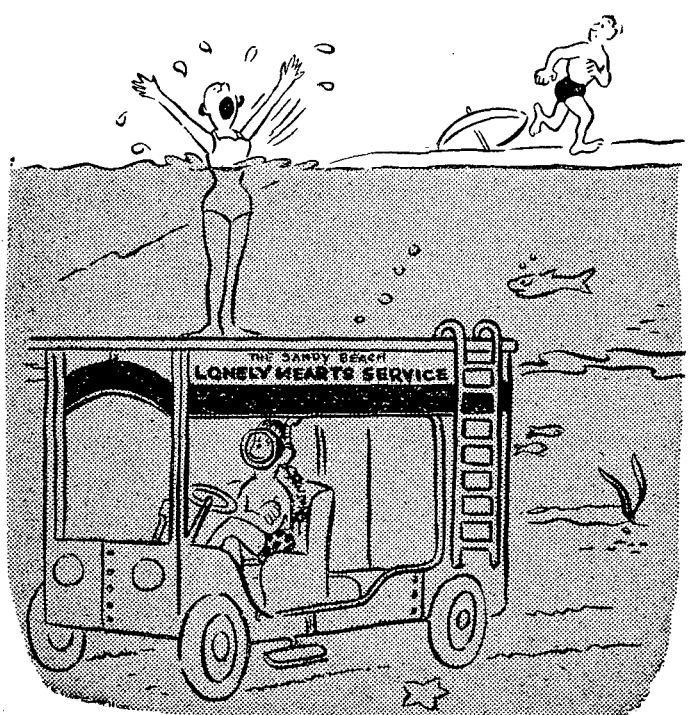

"Help!"

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Brighton Front

To Brighton! To Brighton!
Where they do such things and they say such things!

OLD SONG

Pier Entertainments

"Well, shall we go on the pier? I don't think we're likely to find anyone we know there."

"Oh do let's. I've been in Brighton two days and I haven't set foot on it yet. What fun!"

It was Nia's zest for life that made her so attractive, thought Forster, as he strolled beside her along the esplanade, watching the little waves cream along the pebbles . . .

The wooden planks of the West Pier smelt tarry in the hot sun. Leaning on the warm iron railing, they gazed at the cream-painted, shimmering outline of houses and hotels, crowning the cliff, half dissolved in the golden luminous light of the late afternoon. The band was playing a gay selection from Iolanthe.

"For I'm to be married today, today,
For I'm to be married today,"

hummed Forster.

Nia took his arm and gave it a little squeeze. Slowly, lazily, in perfect accord and contentment, they strolled to the very end of the pier and there, while the crisp little waves slapped against the iron girders so far below, behind the backs of two solid and concentrated fishermen, they kissed.

BETTY ASKWITH, *The Tangled Web*

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Summer Promise

Gulls screech from domes of pier, from Pavilion cupolas,
To snatch wet bread flung by blue-jersied men,
Braced against breezes, making small steps
By their boats, ten paces eastward, then west ten—
The names a kind of mnemonic, Deirdre, Seashell,
Maria—waiting to reinhabit them, to come alive,
—Boats, men, at a standstill—for summer to dive
On them with love, with promise of the sea-swell.

ALAN ROSS, *Winter Boats at Brighton*

Greeneland's Coral Strand

Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him. With his inky fingers and his bitten nails, his manner cynical and nervous, anybody could tell he didn't belong—belong to the early summer sun, the cool Whitsun wind off the sea, the holiday crowd. They came in by train from Victoria every five minutes, rocked down Queen's Road standing on the tops of the little local trams, stepped off in bewildered multitudes into fresh and glittering air: the new silver paint sparkled on the piers, the cream houses ran away into the west like a pale Victorian water-colour . . . He wanted to get back—but all he could do was to carry his sneer along the front, the badge of loneliness.

Somewhere out of sight a woman was singing: "When I came up from Brighton by the train": a rich Guinness voice, a voice from a public bar. Hale turned into the private saloon and watched her big blown charms across two bars and through a glass partition.

She wasn't old: somewhere in the late thirties or the early forties: and she was only a little drunk in a friendly accommodating way.

GRAHAM GREENE, *Brighton Rock*

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Only those towns are happy which stand on hills
Where trains leap the chasm with a plume of smoke
And the white roads spring downwards past the porches.
Our horses canter and bound on the green hill,
The gilded towers glitter, and in the distance
Prances the bright sea, all impatient
To embrace in a frozen cascade the shining town.

N. DEE, *Brighton*, 1946

I believe I wrote you a melancholy sort of letter from Brighton, but they are such horrid people there that I have taken quite a disgust to them. *Letter from Mrs. Fitzherbert, May* 17, 1833

Seaside Villa

This town or village of renown
Like London Bridge, half broken down,
Few years ago was worse than Wapping
Not fit for a human soul to stop in . . .
But now . . .
You'd wonder much, I'm sure, to see
How it's becrammed with quality:
Here Lords and Ladies oft carouse
Together in a tiny house
And what his valet would despise
His lordship praises to the skies.

Brighthelmstone Guide, July 1777

Not Graham!

Oct. 2, 1821. A remarkably fine day. A Mr. Green ascended in a balloon from the Gas Works near Brighton; Mrs. Mantell was walking with me, and we perceived the balloon from the top of Keere Street; it fell in the sea, off Cuckmere . . .

The Journal of Gideon Mantell

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CROWD OF TWO

The man's shadow fell across him—
he spun round, his eyes panic-stricken

BY KEN HARDMAN

A MONTH is a long time," O'Neill muttered, " a bloody long time."

" Oh, shut up." There was no heat in Sheppard's voice; only tiredness. " You've said that ten times in the last hour."

He stood up, tall and gaunt in the yellow light of the oil lamp, and stumped over to the iron stove in the centre of the cabin's single room. Picking up a short iron bar from the top of a heap of split logs, he hooked it under the dully glowing crossbar of the stove lid.

" Have to cut some more logs, of course," he said absently. The glow from the open stove painted his bearded face a dark red, with thin lines of shadow tracing the seams and furrows in his leathery skin like the frantic wanderings of a road map.

O'Neill rested his elbows on the rough plank table and cupped his chin in his hands. With red-rimmed and mournful eyes, he regarded Sheppard with something approaching wonder.

" Ain't you bothered at all, Jeff? I mean, we've been stuck on this hell-hole of an island for nigh on six months already—don't the thought of another month turn your guts over? "

Carefully Sheppard dropped two logs into the stove and clanged the lid back into place. His face was impassive.

" I'm not exactly pleased," he said, " but what the hell—we've got plenty of stores and fuel, and another month's pay will be handy."

O'Neill's small body hunched in the chair, his legs barely reaching to the floor. " That ain't what you said last night when we thought the ship was coming," he said querulously. A spark of fear glittered at the back of his eyes. " You said another week with me an' you'd be ripe for belting me over the head with something. You said—"

" Shut up." Sheppard's tone was casual. " I know what I said. That was the rum talking." His lips twisted within his beard. " We split the last bottle last night, so there's no chance of it happening again."

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"I never knew." The little man clenched his fists on his stubbly cheeks. "I never knew you didn't like me. Not once in the whole six months have you said a word . . ." His voice faded away, leaving only the sighing of the wind through a chink in the door and the spluttering crackle of the new logs in the stove.

Sheppard closed the damper with his big boot. In spite of his heavy sweater and thick canvas trousers, he felt a new bite of coldness in the air. The wind was straight from the Antarctic icefields, the first breath of another gale. His gaze rested on the man at the table for a moment, then shifted deliberately to the bank of radio equipment in a corner of the cabin.

"How are we fixed for batteries?" he asked. "Got enough for another month?"

O'Neill hesitated, not wanting to change the subject; then he said, "I suppose so, if we don't waste any. They always leave a good stock, in case anything like this happens. What d'you suppose the delay is about? They never gave any reason in the message."

Sheppard shrugged. "Something wrong with the factory-ship, maybe; or they've sold out to the Japs. These things happen in the whaling game. You should know—you've been in it long enough." His gaze continued to sweep slowly round the cluttered cabin.

The two trestle bunks, ranged along opposite walls, set the general pattern of the room. One bunk was neatly made, with the blankets stretched drum-tight across the mattress; on the other, a tousled mass of bedclothes spilt over the edge on to the bare plank floor. A pile of dirty clothing engulfed the straight-backed chair by the side of it. The chair by the one bunk was scrubbed white and held only a tin ashtray, a pipe, and tobacco pouch, laid out in meticulous order parallel to the edge of the chair. A suitcase and a seabag stood by the foot of each bunk, packed and bulging in mute readiness for departure.

"Wish to hell I'd never taken the job," O'Neill said petulantly. "Why do they want caretakers on a whaling station, anyway? I was a bloody fool."

Sheppard walked slowly across the room and sat on the tightly-drawn blankets of his bunk. "Aren't we all?" he said. "You've been moaning for six months about all the work you had to do, and now you reckon the station don't need caretakers. You just aren't consistent, Harry."

He picked up the pipe and began to fill it, his calm grey eyes fixed unblinkingly on his companion. His loathing of the untidy little man rose like bile in his throat, but his reason quickly

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smothered it. There was no real harm in O'Neill: he was dirty, lazy, and talked far too much nonsense, but none of these things could explain the savage hatred of him that sometimes woke Sheppard wild-eyed in the night.

The intensity of the feeling scared him a little, for he was normally a quiet, easy-going man. He told himself that they had been cooped up together too long, that this kind of thing always happened when two men of such widely different habits were isolated for a long stretch. But the explanation didn't satisfy his orderly mind. He knew that he could kill O'Neill without the slightest compunction; and that was not an ordinary, routine feeling.

He closed his eyes and shuddered, remembering how close he had been to it last night when they had brought out the rum to celebrate the approaching end of their isolation. Drinking with O'Neill had been a mistake, of course; the little man's bad habits were intensified when he drank, and Sheppard's iron control of himself had relaxed just a little—

O'Neill hawked deep in his throat and spat in the general direction of the stove. Instantly Sheppard was on his feet.

"Don't do that!" he barked. "How many times have I told you, damn it?"

The little man flushed darkly. "All right, all right—keep your hair on." He stood up and walked over to the stove, smearing the spittle into the planking with his seabooted foot as he passed. "Don't know what's come over you lately. We ain't staying at the Ritz, y'know." He cupped his hands round the metal chimney-pipe leading up from the stove to the roof and looked across at Sheppard, his small, puckered face set in a sneer that was halfway between apprehension and bravado.

Sheppard sank back on his bunk. His heart was thumping and the blood roared in his ears. Gradually he unclenched his hands and stared at the crushed box of matches in his palm. He looked up and saw O'Neill's eyes were fixed on the matchbox, too. Quickly he pushed the pipe between his teeth and struck a match, his hand trembling slightly.

"You sure you didn't mean what you said last night about hating my guts?" O'Neill's eyes flicked down at the short iron poker on top of the stack of logs, then back at Sheppard's face.

"What does it matter?" Sheppard looked at his wristwatch. "You'd better get on to Cape Town with the weather data, hadn't you?"

"Let 'em wait," O'Neill said impatiently. "We ain't getting paid to be meteorologists. I want to get this thing settled. I'm gonna be scared to turn my back on you soon."

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Sheppard took a slow draw on his pipe. He was calmer now. " Look, Harry," he said, the name coming unwillingly to his lips, " you don't have to be scared of me. You should know that by now. Whether I like you or not makes no difference; we've got another month to last out somehow. Now, are you going to send the weather, or do I have to do it? You know you're better on the key than I am."

O'Neill smirked. " Glad you realise that, anyway. Maybe you ain't so high an' mighty after all, eh? " He turned and went over to the transmitter. " Where's the readings? "

" There, by the morse key. Better tell them there's a gale brewing, too; although I expect they'll know that from the readings."

The wind had increased noticeably; the door rattled on its hinges and the cabin was filled with little eddies and draughts of cold air. The big globular oil lamp swung gently on its hook in the ceiling, and the pages of a magazine on the table ruffled and lifted eerily.

O'Neill sat down and slid the band of the earphones over his grizzled grey hair. He picked up the scrap of paper from beside the morse key and glanced over his shoulder.

" Yep, here it is. Always on the ball, ain't you ? " His voice was sardonic.

Sheppard watched the smooth, graceful movements of the little man's fingers on the morse key. His shoulders were hunched in concentration, as though channelling all his energy through the key and northwards across the six hundred miles of stormy sea to Cape Town. The only time that Sheppard felt any admiration for the man was when watching him at the morse key. O'Neill was really good.

Sheppard's deep-rooted sense of fairness struggled through the morass of black hatred and tugged at his conscience. Perhaps he ought to try once more to be nice to the little man.

He knew that O'Neill liked a game of cribbage, and they hadn't played for a long time. He stood up and crossed the room to get the crib board and playing-cards from the shelf above the transmitter.

O'Neill switched off the set and was about to remove his earphones when Sheppard's shadow fell across him from behind. He spun round in the chair, his panic-stricken eyes peered out beneath the arm he had thrown up in instinctive protection.

Sheppard, with his own arm raised to reach up to the shelf, looked at him, dumbfounded. With a strangled cry, the little man tore off the earphones and stumbled beneath Sheppard's

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upraised arm. He crossed the room at a shambling run, grabbing the iron poker as he passed the stove.

His hand was on the door-catch when Sheppard shouted, "Harry! What the devil's up with you?"

O'Neill stopped, his body stiff with shock. Slowly he turned round. "You tried to do me when my back was turned," he breathed, his voice hardly audible above the whistling of the wind.

"Don't be a bloody idiot. I was reaching for the crib board. Look." Sheppard took the board down from the shelf and held it out. "I was going to ask if you would like a game."

"Don't give me that crap." O'Neill shifted the poker from one hand to the other. "We ain't played crib for weeks. Why should you want a game now?"

Sheppard let his arm drop to his side. Two of the ivory pegs dropped from the crib board and rolled beneath the table. He felt suddenly fed up with the whole thing. Let the neurotic little bastard think what he liked!

He threw the scoring board on the table. "Have it your own way then," he said abruptly. "I'm turning in now. You're too bloody nervous by half. Perhaps you'll have come to your senses by morning."

He stamped across the room and pulled savagely at the make-shift burlap curtain rigged round his bunk. "Don't forget to turn the lamp out when you've finished brooding!" he shouted.

O'Neill didn't move from the door for fully five minutes. Then he walked slowly back towards the warmth of the stove, never taking his eyes from those gently-swaying curtains.

After six months of soul-destroying routine, the events of the last twenty-four hours had confused him hopelessly. Last night he had been looking forward to the bright lights of Cape Town. Now he was here for another month, and in fear of his life. He hadn't the slightest doubt that Sheppard had meant to kill him just now. But why?

O'Neill ran a grubby hand through his wiry hair. "Maybe he's gone off his rocker," he muttered. Yes! That was it. Sheppard had gone mad.

The little man looked wildly round the room. What was he to do? He was isolated on a barren rock of an island with a madman who was twice his size.

A sudden gust of wind shook the cabin, whistling down the chimney, and squeezing out wisps of acrid smoke around the stove lid. The coarse curtains billowed out.

O'Neill tensed in an agony of suspense. My God, he's coming out! he thought.

The wind died down, the curtain hung limp and still; in the

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cabin now a deathly silence broken only by Sheppard's deep, regular breathing coming from his bunk. O'Neill quietly sank into a chair, wiping the sweat from his forehead. He couldn't go on like this—not for a whole month.

Almost without knowing, he picked up the iron poker and stared at it. At first he didn't realise what he was thinking. Then the beautiful simplicity of the solution struck him with a small shock of power.

Shaking with excitement, he laid the poker on the table and climbed on the chair to reach up for the oil lamp. Carefully, quietly, in the heavy silence he turned the wick down—down until it gave only a thin sliver of light no thicker than a matchstick. Then in the gloomy silence he climbed down again. Moving stealthily to the chair, he sat and took off his seaboots.

The cabin was now almost completely dark, but after a while he could see the red line round the edge of the stove ashpit and the dull red glow of the stove top. The thin white light from the lamp began to take effect as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and he could make out the shadowy outlines of the furniture.

Three times he half rose from the chair, his heart hammering against his ribs, and each time he sank back again. "Wait a bit," he whispered. "Must wait a bit."

When he did at last stand up, he was strangely calm. Taking up the poker from the table, he crossed the room in four strides, his harsh breathing and the scrape of his stockinged feet lost among the small noises of the wind.

With infinite care he parted the burlap curtain, his head and scrawny neck thrusting vulture-like through the gap. He could see the vague shape in the bunk, humping the blankets, and dark against the whiteness of a freshly-washed pillowcase.

Slowly, almost leisurely, he lifted the poker and brought it smashing down on the head. He felt something crush beneath the blow, and he laughed madly, exultantly. Again and again he brought the weapon down until the muscles of his arm stiffened in pain.

Giggling and panting, he stepped back. "There, you bastard," he screamed, "that's messed up your nice clean pillow, hasn't it, eh?"

The strength drained out of him and he felt weak as a kitten. Suddenly the thing on the bunk that had been Sheppard scared him and he drew back across the room, the poker dropping from his nerveless fingers.

"Must get help," he babbled. "Must—Jeff's dead—"

He jumped on the chair and turned the lamp up to its full brightness. Keeping his eyes averted from Sheppard's bunk, he

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flung himself at the transmitter, his practised fingers acting apart from the fever in his brain.

It took him ten frantic minutes to raise Cape Town radio, and another ten to get his incoherent message through. By that time, the full realisation of what he had done brought the sweat oozing from his forehead.

" It's me the bloody fool that's mad," he sobbed as he slumped over the morse key. " God forgive me! "

Cape Town radio was sending something. As O'Neill heard the familiar tap-tap he automatically picked up his pencil and began to write, the words forming themselves on the scrap-pad without apparent help from him. When the message finished, he stared at it uncomprehendingly for a long moment before it began to make sense. *Help already en route. Delay overestimated Fleet sailed tonight for your station.*

O'Neill lowered his head into his hands and wept helplessly.

A gnarled brown hand came over his shoulder and picked up the scrap-pad. He felt the roughness of the woollen sleeve against his neck, and froze in paralysed fright. Slowly, inch by inch, he turned his head.

Sheppard stood behind him, calmly reading the message. O'Neill tried to speak but the words stuck in his throat. The big man looked down at him, his face inscrutable.

" No, you didn't kill me, Harry," he said at last. " That was my seabag you were belting away at. I was asleep under the bunk. I thought you might try something like that."

O'Neill stood up. Relief flooded through him, turning his joints to water. He held up his head. " What are you going to do to me, Jeff? " he said. He didn't really care; not any more.

Sheppard looked at him for a long time without speaking. Then he said, " Do? I dunno." The skin around his eyes crinkled as he smiled. " I know how it gets you, Harry boy, I know. I was very nearly doing the same to you, only I would have succeeded, heaven help me."

He turned away and walked slowly over to the table. " Tell you what I will do," he said over his shoulder, " I'll give you a beating at crib."

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NO STONE UNTURNED?

An accurate wait record of the patient is essential and this is often done in the Out-Patients Department.

ROGER BROOK,
(*a howler from*) *Really, Nurse!*

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No Other Elephant

By

GERALD SPARROW

Gerald Sparrow, a Judge of the International Court, Bangkok, was made a Knight Commander of the Crown of Siam by the last King, Prachadipok. No Other Elephant, Argosy's amazing new adventure, describes his arrival and first years in Siam—during which the 1932 revolution took place. He retired from the East in 1954, now lives in Blackheath, devoting his time to writing, lecturing, and broadcasting.

THERE is nothing in life that ever quite compares with the first discovery of the East, the genuine, flamboyant, garish East that has never bowed to Western domination. The sense of having entered another world with different values, different laws, and different gods is an experience never to be forgotten.

Bangkok is in many ways the most lovely and natural of Eastern cities, a wayward old enchantress that owes nothing to British or French or American culture—a Buddhist city crammed with temples, where the figure of Buddha, in a hundred postures, smiles at the visitor with an eternal serenity.

Yet, though the ways of Bangkok in that May of 1930 were the old ways of the Thai people, the city itself is not old, having been built by the first king of the present dynasty—the Chakri House—only one hundred and fifty-five years ago, after the Burmese

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invaders had sacked and destroyed the more ancient capital of Ayuthia, forty miles up the Menam river inland.

Henry Paget and I set about our exploration of Bangkok the day after our arrival. It was a Thursday and on that day visitors—suitably dressed—were allowed into the Grand Palace in parties. By great good fortune it was also the day that the King was to proceed to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha to change the vestments of the Buddha and present new robes to the priests.

Henry wanted to travel the seven miles to the Grand Palace by rickshaw but I persuaded him to take a taxi. The thought of a

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human trotting with its heavy load for seven miles appalled me. Our taxi was a Fiat, the driver a round-faced smiling Siamese with an orange shirt, who wore a red hibiscus at a rakish angle in his panama hat. He drove with extreme audacity.

Showing our passes we entered the Palace by the great west gate, built of teak painted a royal red.

The Grand Palace is a little royal city. In it the kings of Siam concentrated their audience halls, their harem, the Treasury, the royal Courts, and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the most sacred of the Siamese shrines. Taking off our shoes we passed into the dimness of the Temple. In a corner two young monks, yellow-robed, were at prayer. Men and women as well as children came and went, sinking to their knees on the mosaic floor, raising their hands in salutation of the Emerald Buddha which dominated the altar.

I looked at the image closely.

" Its expression is unearthly. Look at the eyes, Henry. They are comprehending, not like the eyes of an idol . . . "

Henry took another glance at the figure sitting in judgment, surveying all who came.

" I think it is the spirit of Siam," he said. Two small girls came to the altar, placed joss-sticks in the sand, and left a posy of flowers. They did this with a natural grace and seriousness I found touching.

We went from the darkness of the Temple into the hot glaring midday sun. Henry wanted to see the two " white " elephants that were still maintained as emblems of majesty in the Dusit Grounds by the King. We motored over to the two red-and-gold *salas* where the beasts were kept.

The story of the White Elephant is the story of power in the history of Siam and Laos and Burma. The greater the number of such elephants the King had, the more was he respected—and feared. For the White Elephant was said to be a reincarnation of Buddha, the Lord of Life come to earth. The two white elephants of King Prachadipok bore Siamese titles. Each was housed in its own *sala*. Each had its own six servants who brought the food, accompanied the great beasts to their morning bath, and *weid* as they handed up the sugar-canes.

One elephant was a female and appeared small and very bad-tempered, her slits of reddish eyes squinting malevolently at the world. But the other, Pra Warasintorn, was a great tusker who had a very different nature. He was indolent and lordly. Only occasionally would he give the silken rope that bound one of his legs to a teak post an impatient tug.

Pra Warasintorn gazed at Henry and myself as if we, too, were friends. Henry gave him an outsize cane of sugar and the elephant took it gently and with dignity.

Henry smiled. " It's difficult to believe this is 1930 . . .

" Do you know that fifty years ago the milking mothers would come here and offer their breasts to these beasts? They stood in a

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row where we are standing now, trembling with excitement, as the White Elephant walked down the line, roughly seizing the breasts held up to him. Now that must have been a sight."

We walked back over the Pramane Ground as the sun set. The faintest breeze stirred the Temple bells carrying their muted melody out from the Palace towards the city. Both of us had, I think, forgotten that this was the day on which the King visited the Emerald Buddha in State to present robes to the priests at the change of season. But now, as we repassed the western gate, a crowd had gathered. Officials in the blue *panung* were hurrying in and out of the Palace. Police were lining a route on the main highway.

"It must be the King. They would not stop all traffic for anyone else." As Henry said this, a cry went up from the people, who sank to their knees on the roadway. Two lictors appeared waving their symbolic whips.

More than fifty courtiers bore the King on a palanquin on their shoulders. There he was, the last of the absolute monarchs, sitting in a golden chair, wearing the tiered hat of Siamese monarchy, the Maha Mongkut. Around him were the regalia of the Thai kings, the golden betel-box, the whip and the sword, the golden urn and the gold box that contained the royal horoscope. On his feet the King wore the golden slippers. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, assuming, exactly, the expression we had seen on the features of the Emerald Buddha.

Henry and I bowed as this amazing cavalcade swept past us.

"It's like something out of a dream. It's hardly credible."

The great gates swung open to let the King through and, carried high on the shoulders of his nobles, the King of Siam went to his devotions.

We were silent as we raced back to the hotel in another of Bangkok's wayward taxis. In Europe it was possible to smile at the pomp and circumstance of Eastern majesty, to think of Siam as a toy kingdom, ruled by a benevolent magician. But here to his twenty million subjects this was the King, the Lord of Life and Death, the supreme arbiter of destiny.

After bathing and changing our clothes we had the idea of seeing European Bangkok, and sat on the lawn of the Royal Bangkok Sports Club as the Chinese boys brought us whiskies and the members streamed back from their tennis, squash, and golf. This might have been British India or British Africa. It was that extension of Empire, the British-inspired and British-sponsored club. It was the centre and hub of the foreign communities—the Danes, the British, the Germans, the French, the Americans, and the Dutch. Here they all were sitting in small groups, talking their own languages.

We ended the evening in a night club, the Golden Slipper, where a Eurasian chanteuse sang of love as if she meant it.

That week passed too quickly. I got to know Henry better, and found him a restful and considerate companion. We both

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won money at the races and got drunk on the proceeds. And then it was all over. I saw him off at the Hualumpongse railway terminus on his thirty-hour journey to the north to take up his new post as resident assistant manager in the teak forests.

" Good-bye, Henry. Good luck with the elephants."

" And good luck to you with the rogue lawyers."

But within a week I was making the journey that Henry had made before me, seven hundred miles north, with my luggage, my servant Kian, and a new Essex saloon I had bought in Bangkok. The British judge in Chiengmai, in the far north, was taken ill. He must, the Minister said, be relieved immediately—by me.

I wired to Henry in case he should still be in Chiengmai. I thought it more likely that he would already be in the jungle with his elephants, his foresters and his teak trees, but as I stepped down on to Chiengmai station there he was, in shorts and an open shirt, standing next to a handsome Siamese whom I recognised as the chief judge, who had come to meet me.

It was an accident that Henry should be in Chiengmai at all. Pra Chorn had been taken ill with an infection in his right foot that was now healing. Pra Chorn was the pride of the Siam Merchants' " stable " of elephants. Henry had been told to await Pra Chorn and ride him back into the forest. It would serve to introduce Henry to the world of the elephants.

After talking to the chief judge I accompanied Henry to the Siam Merchants' bungalow, a fine building, all teak, but cool and spacious. Henry showed me my bedroom, a vast room with a giant bed and mosquito-net.

After we had dined Henry said, " Gerald, I'd like you to look at Pra Chorn. I do not think you will have seen anything like him ever before . . . "

We walked across the lawn, down to the Meiping, the Chiengmai river, reaching a gully where the convalescent beast was tethered.

I saw him standing by the water, a vast brown shape against the darkening sky. Two magnificent tusks gleamed in the gathering dusk. At that moment he bent to suck water into his trunk which he shot in a high spray over his back. The elephant rose to his full height. As we approached him he loomed over us, a gigantic, regal beast, a king among elephants.

" Is it safe to go up to him? "

Henry laughed. " Look." He strolled up to Pra Chorn and handed him a green branch the mahout had collected. Pra Chorn took it and ate it. I had the impression that time stood still. I saw a frieze before me, the slim young Englishman and the giant of an elephant. They were looking at each other, and I thought, They understand one another, these two.

Nai Sorn, the mahout, came up. He spoke a little English. " Strange, Nai," he said, " the young Master and Pra Chorn behave as if they had always known one another. Pra Chorn never like this before . . . "

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We walked back to the bungalow. I had seen something elemental, an elephant who had made a pact with man, but had retained the dignity of the jungle.

The little "city" of Chiengmai was as unlike Bangkok as it was possible to be. Bangkok we had found sophisticated, calculating, urbane, worldly. It was a city that could seduce and captivate. The life it offered was so easy, so gay. But its values were those of money, power, prestige, opportunity. Over its scheming million inhabitants the King, the Lord of Life and Death, ruled absolutely, and he alone seemed to represent something spiritual. He gave purpose and meaning to the temples, their spires pointing, like slender golden fingers, to heaven.

In Chiengmai Henry and I soon discovered that we had come to a different world, a young world with the beauty and grace and arrogance of youth. Partly, no doubt, this was due to the people. The ten thousand people in the town were northern Siamese or, more accurately, Lao. They were fairer than the people of the south, and gave the impression of being franker and freer. Certainly they were nearer the earth which in teak and rice gave them their livelihood. In Bangkok a great many papers were shuffled every day, official papers tied, believe it or not, in red tape, but written in Thai. In Chiengmai the spoken word was usually considered enough for a bargain. There were no newspapers in the north; only the *Bangkok Times* arrived by train twice a week.

Government, too, was very simple in Chiengmai. The Viceroy of King Prachadipok, the "Tesar," represented the Bangkok Government. His word was law. But a very considerable residue of influence remained in the hands of the "Chows," the Lao princes, and especially in the hands of the venerable Chow Luang of Chiengmai, who had been king of the north before Bangkok stretched out her hand to subdue the tiger in the jungle.

Yet it was none of these characteristics that gave Chiengmai its strange, pristine air. The virginity of the place was in the air; in its fresh, sparkling dawns, when the women came into the markets carrying their loads of produce on their heads; it revealed itself in the quiet, untamed river, teeming with fish, that swept round the town; it culminated in the great mountain of Doi Sutep that rose from the high plateau on which Chiengmai was built, majestically, six thousand feet into the intense blue sky. Chiengmai was a walled city, too, and its traffic was the sedate, leisurely traffic of the horse gharry, the buffalo, the bicycle, and sometimes of the elephant.

The elephant was a part of Chiengmai. There were elephants for pleasure, and elephants for work. There were the semi-wild herd of the Chow Luang that roamed, more or less at will, on Doi Sutep. There were the five elephants of His Britannic Majesty, based on the British Consulate and used only for ceremony, whose cost of upkeep from time to time disturbed inquisitive, parsimonious members of the House of Commons; and then, of course, there were the working elephants of the British, French,

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and Danish teak companies, several hundred elephants in all. Of these Pra Chorn, whom I had glimpsed for that quick moment by the gully by the Meiping, was the acknowledged and unchallenged king.

Chiengmai, in a sense, belonged to the elephants. The life of the little city centred round the great beasts. But Chiengmai was, we found, a man's world too. Apart from the French and American missionary wives, there were no white women in Chiengmai. There were, according to the season, from two hundred to fifty European men. Normally nearly all the assistants in the teak firms would be away in their forests, in Muang Fang, beyond Chiengmai and further north and west, as far as the Shan states and French Indo-China. But at Christmas they would all swarm back into the little town to celebrate with letters from home and drink—and women.

The women, of course, were the young Lao women of Chiengmai. Between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six the Lao girls had an appeal that was elemental and direct. They were lissom and lovely. They smiled with a gaiety and abandon that was captivating. But . . .

The law and custom of the north declared that if a man and a woman cohabited permanently with faithfulness to each other they were man and wife whether the marriage was registered or not. If a girl had been kept by a man for some months she would begin naturally and in good faith to refer to him as *pua*—my husband. And in the eyes of all her friends and relations she was his wife.

This led to the strange society of Chiengmai which, in its oddity and completeness, had no equal anywhere else in the Far East. The old teak-firm managers had Lao " wives," and usually large families by these wives, but the men were English, and arrived at a curious, but characteristic, compromise.

They held fast to their British traditions, their links with home, their schools, their universities and their clubs, while their domestic life was that of the lord of a small tribe, the Lao women and their children, whom no man except the master was allowed to approach. They had become little kings in their own right.

It had been arranged that I should stay on in the Siam Merchants' bungalow for a week with Henry until a house of my own had been prepared for me by the Ministry of Justice. This suited me very well.

Henry already knew something of Chiengmai and its unusual community. Pra Chorn would take another week to rest and recuperate before he was fit to ride. The chief judge had suggested that I should start attending the court on the following Monday. It was then Tuesday. There was no outrageous hurry in Chiengmai. Henry and I had time to explore the city, Henry acting as guide, and I as his inquisitive audience.

" I sent a message over last night to the Chow Luang, asking whether the old gentleman could receive us today. He has just replied that he would be very happy to see us, and suggests I

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should bring you along ' for tea.' I don't think it's tea as you and I know it, but we'll see."

" What do we do this morning, Henry? I suppose we go to the Chow Luang about five? "

" Yes, and this morning you can bring that interloping car of yours. We'll park it in the main street and walk around. The market here has not changed in a hundred years. It's worth seeing."

Kian, my servant, drove the Essex and in a matter of minutes we had crossed the New Bridge and were in the market. The shops were small, tidy, and very clean. The floors were of polished teak and usually a young Lao woman, a flower in her hair, her *prain* skirt worn under a silk blouse, would be the saleswoman. Yet that was hardly the term. Never was salesmanship so unpressurised. The girl would smile as we arrived, invite us to look around—and wait. If we asked a price she would tell us. If we bought, she would wrap the purchase in silver paper, smile again, and hand it to us. When we paid her she would *wei* and receive the money in her delicate brown hands. Twice we were told that the price was whatever we wished to pay—*tam chai*—as you wish. On the whole, merchandising in Chiengmai market was a happy, unhurried, gracious, feminine affair.

I bought a set of lacquer finger-bowls. Finger-bowls in Chiengmai seemed to me a pleasing conceit and these were lovely, black and shining, with golden trees windswept by a river.

We visited the six gold shops and the seven silversmiths. They were grouped together. The owners of these shops were Chinese. Here there was no doubt about the price, but it was a real price based on the Bangkok quoted prices for gold and silver and *nac*, a compound of copper and gold, of which the women's belts were made. Each merchant had a delicate and accurate scale which he would hold up to the light to read the verdict determined by the weight of the metal. The Chinese goldsmiths and silversmiths wore white cotton singlets and black heavy silk trousers. They were fat, smooth yellow men with a certain dignity.

The diamond merchants were quite different. Here again the sales were in the hands of the women, but of old women, some of whom had their teeth discoloured by chewing betel. They were shrewd and merry, laughing and shouting to one another. The diamonds they had for sale were not as white as those one sees in Asprey's and in Sanford's and Tiffany's. They had a green gleam to them. But this, I thought, increased their lustre and excitement.

Although it was broad daylight, with the sun now beating down on us, the diamond shops were all shaded and had naphtha flares within, so that the diamonds glittered and sparkled like so many mischievous stars. Each stone rested on its little bed of black velvet. The old women of Chiengmai market knew how to sell their stones.

Towards the end of the long cobbled street we came to the silk shops, two of which belonged to Chow Tongkam, a Lao princess who wove her silk at nearby Lampoon and sold it in Chiengmai

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market before Thai silk became an international business in the smart shops of London, Paris, and New York.

Chow Tongkam was present herself this morning. For the first time we heard English spoken.

"Mr. Paget. Mr. Sparrow. How nice to see you. Would you like to look at our silk? This girl will attend to you." With a smile, Chow Tongkam greeted other customers. I had the impression of a hostess receiving guests at a reception in Europe.

Henry said, "You'd better buy some silk. It will come in useful for your house, for curtains or bedcovers." I did as I was told.

We took our leave of Chow Tongkam and again I had the impression of the grande dame bidding her guests farewell. I mentioned to Henry that the lady seemed very well informed. I had only so recently arrived.

"Yes. In Chiengmai, I think, the stage is small and all the actors are on the stage and know each other."

I told Tok to drive us to the little Chiengmai Club for a drink before lunch. The attap-roofed building looked out on nine parched holes of a golf-links. A group of boy caddies in red singlets waited under a mango tree, hopefully. We ordered lager and the servant brought us Danish lager like that we had drunk on the ship before arrival. At first we thought the club deserted, but in a moment I noticed one member peering at us from beneath his *Bangkok Times*. Seeing that we had observed him, he put down his paper.

"Morning. Have a drink?"

He was a man in the late fifties, tall and strong with blue eyes peering from beneath the shaggiest eyebrows I had ever seen. He was immaculate in a grey shantung silk suit. He was also a legend in the north, having just retired after thirty years. He had a Lao wife, Chalah, who had borne him eighteen children—twelve girls and six boys.

"Just out from home? I'm due for a trip next month. Lovely time of the year to get back. In time for Goodwood. You'll like it here. A man's country. Either of you play golf?"

We both pleaded guilty. "Good. Must fix a round one day." With a nod, this remarkable renegade disappeared behind the protection of his *Bangkok Times*.

We both slept that afternoon, drowsy from the Danish beer. It was past four when I awoke. I called to Henry. He was already under his shower.

Just before five, Tok brought the Essex round to the door. He stood there beside it, holding the door open, his round, brown face smiling in the evening sun.

"To the Prince, Nai?"

"Yes." I did not ask him how he knew. I was becoming accustomed to the fact that in Chiengmai there were no secrets.

As the green saloon took us down the drive five children returning from school ran to the side of the road, knelt, and *wei*d. We passed out of the town. The ricefields were dry here. The rains

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had not yet fallen. On a tree a flock of vultures screeched and scratched. Only the occasional buffalo cart impeded our progress.

" You know where the Prince's Palace is, Tok? "

" Yes, Nai, I know. The Prince's house is at the foot of the hill. It is the heart of Chiengmai. All paths lead to the Palace of the Prince. He is a good man, Nai, but his relatives—" Tok stopped himself.

" What about them? "

He hesitated. " No one has ever said no to them. That makes them proud. And there is money in the north, Nai. Money from teak and gems and the opium. That makes them greedy. The story will tell itself . . ."

We turned off the road, through a great teak gate painted red which opened as we approached. Looking back on it now I realise that it was at this first meeting with the Prince of Chiengmai that the story of Henry and Pra Chorn began. But there was nothing to indicate this in the genuflecting courtesy of our reception.

As Henry and I were ushered into the Chow Luang's reception-room I recalled what I had read and learnt of the Lao princes. Until recently they had been the kings of the north owing only a technical allegiance to the Lord of Life in Bangkok. As well as the Prince of Chiengmai there were the ruling princes of Lampang, Lampoon, Prae, and Nan.

Many of them were related by marriage to the Shan princes. All of them were the children of a world that has now passed, a world of prostration, of absolute obedience and absolute authority. They had always been and behaved like spoilt children, but children who could be murderous when crossed. They had never developed the sophistication and international urbanity of the kings of Siam.

The Lao princes had never known poverty. The north was fertile and, without any plan of conservation, the princes and lords of the land would fell the teak trees where and when they found them. They farmed, too, and took a tithe from their tenants. And then there was opium, the black gold of the north. Their privileged position enabled them to direct the opium traffic at least as far as Chiengmai Station Rest-house, which was a clearing house for the drug. After that it passed into the hands of the Chinese—and the police, who have always had a big stake in the opium business in Siam. The white poppies grew on the distant hills and valleys over which there was no police control and the planting of the poppy was changing constantly, so that by the time one location became known it was no longer in use.

Two developments changed the life of the northern princes. The first was the creation of a Siamese army and police force that subdued the north, dividing it into *changwads* or administrative circles headed by a governor or tesar. The second was the leasing by the Bangkok Government of the teak forests to foreign lessees, especially the British Borneo Company and Bombay Burma, as

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well as Leonowens, to the Danish and French East Asiatic Companies, and to one or two Chinese-dominated syndicates. This political and commercial encroachment into the north destroyed the overlordship of the Lao princes. It was a gradual process, but it was relentless.

No longer were all the loveliest girls automatically available for the princes before marriage; the time when the little sons of heaven had walked in a paradise of their own creation was over. I did not know how keenly the princes felt this situation. Resentment against the powers that be was never voiced in old Siam. The Lord of Life and Death, in Bangkok, might hear of what you had said and the penalty for treason was that you and all your family should be " blotted out and disposed of."

The Chow Luang's Palace was one of the few brick-built houses in Chiengmai. Teak was the ordinary material used in building. In this house the floors were made of teak as well as the furniture, which was painted red and gold. It was a low, white, rambling house, with innumerable outhouses and courtyards and more than a dozen minor houses to accommodate relatives or wives who were out of favour. The compound, which was carefully kept, included a lawn and a fountain, mango and banana groves, and the stables both for the Prince's racing ponies and for his elephants. The ménage was maintained by over a hundred servants and many of the more distant relatives of the Prince took up the status of retainers little removed from that of servants.

Four servants, dressed in white, showed us into the reception-room, which was, I think, the showroom of the house. At one end was a portrait in oils of the Prince in his regalia—a fine, dominating figure, but showing a face that expressed compassion and understanding as well as pride. At the other far end of the room were the finest pair of elephant's tusks I have ever seen, set in gold and rosewood. The room was very sparsely furnished by European standards, but a dozen mirrors made it seem even larger than it was. The painted teak couches and tables were finely made, presumably by local craftsmen. I was amused to see a large opium couch, finely carved in ebony, complete with its porcelain pillow.

" There is everything in this room that makes the north. Have you noticed? "

Henry nodded. " Teak, elephants, opium. And the mirrors—this is Through The Looking-glass land." Henry's comments often contained that unusual and pleasing twist of his mind that saw a little further than the visible and tangible.

At that moment a door opened at the far end of the room, a door that led in from the garden. Through it walked the Prince, alone, wearing a white coat with high collar and the *panung* of cherry silk. He was a smart, alert old gentleman, nearing seventy with great dignity. His manners were gracious and friendly. He seemed genuinely glad to see us. He spoke English fluently, but with an Eastern intonation. He had never been abroad, and on only three occasions had he ventured as far as Bangkok.

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He turned to Henry.

" Ah, Mr. Paget, very nice of you to bring the new judge to see me. Sit down. My people will be bringing us some tea and we can talk."

Although the Prince addressed himself mainly to Henry, I had the impression that he was quickly summing me up; that, for some reason, my character and habits were of interest, even of importance, to him.

" It is always a pleasure to welcome new faces in Chiengmai. We are such a small community. Everyone gets to know everyone else's business. You will already have realised that. But it's a good place to live in. Once you have lived here you will never be quite content in any other place. The north has a charm all its own. We are not busy and worried like our friends in Bangkok . . ."

At this moment a line of servants came in with the " tea." As Henry had suspected, it was not quite tea on English lines. There *was* tea served in little porcelain handleless cups from a Chinese teapot, tea served with lemon, but there were also dishes of noodles cooked in rich rice and butter, Chiengmai sausages stuffed with pork and pepper, wild strawberries which we learnt had come from the hills on the Burma border, and all the fruits of the north: mangosteen, pawpaw, and large red melons that were iced, with the black pips removed. I noticed that all the fruit had been carefully prepared. Even the oranges had the skins and pips removed. The Lao women are adept at this work, peeling always away from the body and not towards it, as we do in Europe.

No sooner had the servants withdrawn than the Prince's family, who had been riding, joined us. There were more than a dozen sons, nephews, and nieces, and the Prince's favourite wife, a young woman called Jadah. She was a lovely creature, but of a conventional beauty without fire, I thought.

She was overshadowed by a niece of the Prince, Wanta, a girl of seventeen, an elfin, vibrant creature with blue-black hair, brown eyes of exceptional beauty and softness, what the Siamese describe as *ta wan*—the tender-eyed. I looked at Henry. He had seen her, too.

Later I believed that Wanta fell in love with Henry that day. Both of them, aware of what was happening, tried, I think, to prevent the magnetism the one had for the other being obvious. But both of them had the attraction that is so rare, something faun-like in their make-up, something simple and animal and free.

Of the men of the party the forceful personality belonged to the Prince's nephew, Chow Dam—the Black Prince. Chow Dam was very dark for a Lao; his mother had been a servant girl, it was said, in the House of the Sawbaw of Kentung, but the Prince had been devoted to his father, who had been killed by a marauding tiger in high grass while duck-shooting near the upper reaches of the Meiping. So Chow Dam was in favour with the Prince, in spite of an arrogance and viciousness that were stamped all too plainly on features that had once been handsome, but already, at the age of

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thirty, were marked by too many women and too much brandy, a curious and unexpected vice for the Laos.

I noticed that the servants when they handed dishes to the Chow Luang smiled and were unafraid, but those who served Chow Dam trembled as if in fear of a sudden outburst from him. He was a man of moods, it seemed. He could be sweet and reasonable. In such a mood he could get anything he wanted from his uncle, but if angered he was a spiteful sadist.

The talk turned to the teak forests and whether machines would replace the elephant labour. The Prince said the elephants were irreplaceable.

"There are two things no machine can do. The first is to plant rice, and the second is to move the teak logs efficiently into the river and ease a jam in the river itself. Both these operations are impossible for machines. The rice must be planted in mud that will bear no machine, and only the intelligence of the trained elephant and his enormous strength applied at exactly the right spot in the right way can move the teak tree."

Chow Dam was less sure.

"Everything changes. Already the forests are becoming mechanised. The machines and the exploiters march on. Only death will stop them."

The Prince did not like this grim observation. He turned the conversation to a dance that was to be held in Chiengmai on the birthday of the King of Siam, the first of its kind. He would attend himself and of course the Tesar and all the officials.

"Perhaps you two young men would like to come in my party? I am sure my young princesses would be delighted."

Henry accepted at once.

"It is very kind of you. Of course we should be delighted to come with you."

I think the old Prince intended to overcome the remarks of Chow Dam by his own politeness, for he asked us to look at his ponies. We all followed him across the lawns to the stables where more than a dozen Shan racing ponies, improved by Arab blood, were stabled. The hacks that the family had been riding were in the yard being groomed, watered, and led to the sandpit, where they rolled.

I noticed that one hack had deep weals on its hindquarters, deeper and more savage than the marks that jockeys make with their whips in a hard-fought race. The old Prince noticed what I had seen, and spoke to Chow Dam in Thai. Though I only spoke a few words of the language I knew from his tone he spoke in rebuke.

It was time for us to take our leave and this we did, thanking the old Prince for his hospitality and invitation. The Prince turned to his niece.

"Wanta, walk with these gentlemen a little way and see them to their car." So saying, with a wave and a smile, the Prince disappeared into his palace.

Wanta talked as we walked.

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" It's stifling here sometimes. You don't know the north yet. It captivates you, but you are its prisoner. You don't know what this dance means to us. We can go nowhere without a servant who is also a guard." She smiled. " I'm afraid we are not very modern, yet."

Henry spoke gravely. " I like you just as you are."

We had reached the car. In a moment we were off. Wanta waved and turned towards the house, but as we turned into the main road I caught a glimpse of the stables again and to this day I remember the shock of what, for a moment, I saw. A groom was holding the hack that had the angry weals on its quarters. The beast was trembling and for good reason, for Chow Dam, his face contorted with rage, was thrashing it.

Henry saw it too. He rose in his seat, but I stopped him.

" It's no good. If we go back now he will find means of torturing that horse."

Henry nodded. We had had our first introduction to the princes of Chiengmai—and we had learnt to look below the smooth and serene surface if we wished to discern the angry currents of this strange country.

I can remember King Prachadipok's birthday in 1931 as clearly as if it were yesterday. It was the day I moved from Henry's house to my own teak-and-brick house that the Siamese had prepared for me by the river. It was a charming little place with more than an acre of garden, two lawns, one in front, one at the rear. The floors of the two rooms on the ground floor were of polished teak, one I used as a sitting-room, the other as a dining-room. From the lumber-room of the International Court I borrowed a silver-and-gold punkah, that swung above the dining-table. The kitchen was apart from the house. A covered passage, more than thirty yards long, led to it. Upstairs there were two bedrooms, a bathroom, and a boxroom. There was no European bath, but a silver bowl with which to scoop water out of a giant " Java " jar. This one splashed over oneself. In the heat it was more effective and refreshing than it sounds.

I at once saw that the garden had possibilities. I have been a gardener all my life, which has certain disadvantages. I always felt that if you stuck anything alive in the soil it should grow. And the rich, red soil of Chiengmai fostered this illusion. It was a very short time before the flowers that will thrive in the north—balsam, zinnias, bougainvillaea, orchids (very hardy), winter roses, night convolvulus—were decorating the garden of the house I called Sen Sabai, which means happiness.

This was the Monday when it had been arranged I should visit the court for the first time. Tok drove me there in the Essex. I passed two other cars on the way, the yellow Daimler of the Tesar, and the buff Packard of the Chow Luang. There were no other cars in Chiengmai. The next year the great car-sale boom in the north started, and over a dozen cars congested the market street.

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The chief judge, Phya Indra, greeted me. He was an urbane, sophisticated Siamese.

When the revolution came he cried out aloud against the misfortune that had posted him away from the capital at such a time when the old order was passing and Siam was changing course. For Phya Indra was very advanced in his thinking for a high official of the old regime. He believed in democracy. He believed in voting, and representative government. He believed in equality before the Law.

Naturally he kept these dangerous concepts to himself. He did not wish to be exiled to some even more remote province such as Muang Tark, nor did he wish to sit, in silver chairs, in an open gaol in Bangkok. He was a secret revolutionary. He was not against the King, of course. "The Siamese must always have a king. Everyone behaves better when the King is there." But he thought absolute rule by a princely ruling caste undignified. He wanted power to be in the hands of the people.

I never knew all this for certain—though I suspected it—until the revolution came on the 24th June 1932 when I found him sitting hunched at his desk, almost in tears. "My God, how I wish I had been there!" His sympathies must have been known, for he was recalled to Bangkok and given an important post in the capital.

At our first meeting on this morning all was peace. Tok had driven me over the New Bridge, across the Meiping that gleamed gaily, freshly, in the morning sun, its brown body alive with sampans that shot quickly across from bank to bank laden with fruit and laughing people. I climbed the steps of the old teak courthouse and there he was in his white coat and blue *panung*, Phya Indra, the chief judge of Chiengmai.

"I hope you've settled down comfortably. The court is closed today for His Majesty's birthday. We celebrate for five days, as you know, but I asked the judges to come here to meet you so that when we sit again we shall all know each other. This is my room. Yours is just over the way. Let me show it to you."

It was a small room with a head-fan. On the wall was a single picture of Mont Blanc, a snow scene of enormous iciness, intended, I think, to offset the heat of Chiengmai. There was a desk and a chair. There were two windows. One looked out over the cages in which prisoners awaiting trial that day were kept. The other had a charming view of the river through a mango grove. Seven prisoners in chains were cleaning the paths outside my window. A policeman in charge of the gang sat with his gun in the shade, smoking a cheroot.

The prisoners, I noticed, had chains of varying weights, according to the type of crime they had committed. The more heinous the crime, the heavier the chain. I noticed that they kept their chains up by a string tied to a belt around their waists. Had it not been for this the iron would have eaten into their flesh. As it was they had to move in a curious duck-like waddle—which became natural to them—to make the chains bearable.

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" Now come and meet our judges."

He introduced me to each in turn. One, Phra Salop, was a man of middle age. I got to know him well. He complained to me that his wife would keep on having children, eleven to date. " It's really very difficult on the pay we get here. We've only been married twelve years." Three of the judges were smart young Siamese from Bangkok doing rather reluctantly a period " up-country." And the fifth judge was Chow Rart, who was of course a relative of the Chow Luang. Chow Rart was the only judge who spoke not one word of English.

" But," said Phya Indra, " he understands the country people. The Lao people speak Siamese, but their intonation and many of the words they habitually use are quite different from the Bangkok speech. These young gentlemen "—the judge waved to his young judges—" say that they can't understand a word some witnesses say, especially the old women from the country who are very uneducated."

The set-up of the International Court amused me. They were such distinct characters. There was Phya Indra, so very civilised, the urbane, secret revolutionary. There was poor Phra Salop with his ever-increasing family. There were the three fashionable young judges from Bangkok, pining for the lights and pretty girls of the capital, and there was Chow Rart, the only judge who could understand the Lao people when they were speaking their own patois. Chow Rart gave the impression of being a pliable man without a principle to his name. His manners were beautiful.

Phya Indra showed me the Bench. Two steps led to it through heavy silk curtains that were drawn and withdrawn as one mounted and dismounted. There were four chairs. " Usually you will sit with three judges. Three is a quorum and in international cases you all sign the judgment, but any of you may dissent and write a minority judgment. I don't think you will find that necessary very often. There is compromise in the air in the north." Phya Indra smiled.

I felt that he, himself, would be very skilled at composing any differences that might arise. They would, I imagined, melt before his gentle and skilful pleas for unity.

I thanked the judges for showing me the court and we chatted about the dance to be held that evening. All would be present except Phra Salop. " My wife is expecting yet another baby this evening or tomorrow. I doubt if I shall be able to come."

But Phya Indra thought otherwise. " I think you should, you know, Khun Phra. The King does have a list of those present and it is in fact a command. I think your charming wife is now very skilled in these matters. Could you not come just for an hour? "

Phra Salop raised his hands in the *wei* to his forehead and said " *Krapom*," which can be roughly translated as, " I agree with your order and please pour ashes on to my head."

The discipline of the Siamese hierarchy was as absolute as the monarchy. The Somdetch Chow Phyas overlorded the Chow

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Phyas, the Chow Phyas received the genuflection of the Phyas, the Phyas ruled over the Phras, and the Phras were obeyed by the Khun Luangs. It was a static but complete organisation. There was no freedom to speak one's mind, but there was no chaos, no unruly political fighting. Each man knew his place and, over all, the Lord of Life in Bangkok ruled magnificently, a god on earth.

Henry and I had arranged to play round the Chiengmai Gymkhana golf course for the first time before the dance. We met at five when the sun was already relenting. As we walked on to the first tee, two of the little red-coated caddies darted forward to carry our bags. The course was intersected with water in the form of *klongs*, irrigation canals, quite narrow and not deep.

From time to time both of us would slice or pull into one of these water-traps. Then a darting red figure threw off his vest and plunged in to retrieve the ball from the muddy bottom. The caddies were expert at this. In less than ten seconds they would break surface holding the ball in one hand and sweeping back their long hair from their eyes with the other. The sun was still strong enough to dry their bodies almost instantly. The game went on. One stroke penalty. Drop where you like not nearer the hole.

I asked Henry to dine with me mainly to test the capabilities of a Chinese cook, Ah Tong, whom Tok had engaged in the market. Ah Tong had imposing references. Some of them were so old that it seemed impossible that they had all been forged—or borrowed. In fact, none of them had. He was an excellent cook and that night, with iced consommé, roast venison, and wild strawberries, he was at his best.

To celebrate we opened and finished a bottle of champagne, not an extravagant gesture at seven shillings a bottle. We called the car and drove to the Tesar's official residence, where the dance was to be held.

The house of the Tesar of Chiengmai was an old teak house and, on ordinary days, shabby, with a large, half-neglected garden. But on that evening, in Siamese fashion, it had been transformed. The garden was ablaze with flowers, orchids, marigolds, and petunias potted out during the afternoon. The lawns had been scythed, the trees were hung with naphtha flares and Chinese lanterns. These Chinese lanterns had Thai characters painted on them and each said in different words the same thing: " Long live our supreme Lord, His Majesty the King! "

The Tesar stood with his wife at the head of a staircase and received the guests, but we had to wait for the arrival of the Chow Luang, in whose party we were. We waited, but no Prince of Chiengmai came. Then Henry noticed something.

" Look, those men. They're taking down a fence into a field."

And so they were. Very quickly a gap had been made in the fence—two minutes later the great buff car of the Chow Luang drove majestically through the opening. The roads and lanes were congested by guests arriving. The Prince of Chiengmai had sent

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his men to make a road for his car through the fields. It was a regal gesture. The Prince came up to us at once.

" It's very nice to see you again. Wanta will introduce you to all these people." He waved, indicating his retinue. We followed him up the stairs. The Tesar *wei*d deeply to the Prince and the Prince smilingly acknowledged the greeting. Servants, bowing and walking backwards—not an easy accomplishment—showed the Prince and his wife to their seats, two gilded, throne-like seats at the far end of the ballroom. The Thai National Anthem, a tune bursting with majesty, composed by the bandmaster of Louis XV, was played. The entire assembly rose. Then the music began.

Wanta was dressed in traditional Thai evening dress. Her *prasin* skirt was gold and a royal blue. Her blouse was white lace. She wore no rings, but a diamond brooch, and in her hair a black and gold orchid. She was enchanting. She moved like the breath of spring and her smile seemed to come from her heart which was young and gay.

The Black Prince was in the party. He had clearly been drinking and was in a very jovial mood. Had we not seen the incident of the thrashed hack we would have been impressed by his air of " Let's have a ball, and we'll all dance till the dawn." As it was, I disliked him so intensely that it was with difficulty that I was civil to him. I had a notion that as the evening went on, and he resorted more and more frequently, his beastliness would reassert itself—and it did.

But now everything was gay and lovely. The candelabra shone handsomely, reflecting the dancers in the great gilt mirrors. I danced with Wanta. Henry danced with her twice. We all had supper—mountains of country fruit brought in by the Tesar's servants, moving with that extraordinary agility on their knees.

After supper came the display of classical dancing by Chow Luang's private troupe. Twenty-five young girls danced the *Ram tieng*, the candle dance of the Laos. Fifty candles glinted in the darkness. All the lights had been put out. The flames mounted and sank, twisted and turned, in perfect unison. This was a fairy story come to life.

As the lights went on and the dancers sank to their knees in deep obeisance, the applause rang out. The dancing started again.

It was the question of taking Wanta home that caused the incident. We offered to drive her to her father's palace. She said, " Wait a minute, I think it will be all right."

She whispered a word to her uncle. He nodded, smiling.

Wanta ran up to us. " Yes, quick, now. The party is breaking up." But as we reached the staircase Chow Dam lurched in front of us.

He took Wanta by the shoulder. " You wait," he said. Wanta tried to free herself. Suddenly his eyes, which had been suspicious, blazed with anger.

" *Farangs*," he said. " Foreign dogs."

I think that Henry hit him more quickly than I have seen any

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blow delivered even in the professional boxing ring. He collapsed into a chair, his head hanging loosely on his chest. We ran down to the car and drove home through the dawn with Wanta.

The market women were coming in from the country, their loads high on their heads, a few fires were burning in the cool morning mist, sending drifts of smoke across the road. None of us spoke.

As Wanta got out at the Prince's palace she seemed to be crying.

" I loved it all so much," she said. " Why had he to spoil it? " She looked at Henry. " You return to your forest tomorrow? "

" Yes."

" It is just as well. He will never forget." Then she ran up the long drive to the Palace door.

We rested that day, but at dawn next morning I went to see Henry off.

Pra Chorn had fully recovered now. Nai Sorn said he could march his four hours a day, from six to ten, nearly twenty miles. He would not march after ten, for then the sun was really hot. He made his own labour rules. Most elephants could be persuaded to prolong their march, but not Pra Chorn. At ten punctually he would halt, and no prods or inducement would persuade him to move another inch.

He had been bathed already when I arrived, the mahout straddling his back as he disported himself in the Meiping. He had been " dressed " too, the loose howdah strapped to his back, a howdah made of wood and cushioned but small, not like the great bridges from which the tiger was shot.

At the call of Nai Sorn, Pra Chorn rose from the dust-pit where he had been rolling. He rose slowly, his forefeet first, then his hind feet. Then he looked round, standing at his own great height, over seventeen feet of him to the top of his great grey dome. Then he trumpeted to tell the world he was ready. The noise of that trumpeting shook the neighbourhood. Henry put a foot on the great elephant's tusk and was lifted slowly, decorously, into the howdah. Nai Sorn straddled Pra Chorn's neck, his gnarled legs tucked in behind the beast's vast ears.

The six coolies of the retinue shouldered their loads. Everything was ready for the five-day march to Henry's forest. " Come and see me as soon as you can. The Forestry Department know the way. Fifty miles due north of Chiengmai. We have a bungalow. Muang Sutep. Remember."

" I'll come just as soon as the court has a holiday."

Nai Sorn shouted, " *Owah, Pai.*" Pra Chorn swung out of the gully carrying his old friend, Nai Sorn, and his new master, Henry Paget.

I envied Henry. He was going into that strange country beyond the man-made barriers, the land of the tiger, the bear, and the barking deer, a country that had the feel of the animals and not the feel of man.

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He waved as he reached a bend in the river and that was the last I saw of him for three months.

The three months I spent getting acquainted with my work in the International Court were serene and happy. The tensions and complications that lay ahead threw no shadow across my path. Chiengmai seemed a simple place, violent at times, perhaps, but of a single plain pattern, like the best Thai silk that captivates the eye by the glow of its colour and the sensuous sheen of its fabric.

In Chiengmai facts, emotions, position, life itself, seemed clear-cut. Love was love here, and hate was hate. They did not seem to blend into one another, each evoking the other. The strict structure of Siamese society seemed to give a permanent rigidity and pattern to our mode of living. Even the old British teak kings were uncomplicated, their petty prides were childish, harmless, even endearing . . .

Opium, of course, was not a simple drug. It made men dream and when men dream anything may happen, but the dreams the drug conjured from the poppy-fields were not, it seemed, dreams that had dwelt in the man's subconscious mind, but dreams that sprang from the drug itself, which was evil and beautiful.

I do not think the opium smokers or the opium eaters would have given Freud or Jung much pleasure. They were slaves, not free men, whose personalities and actions were rooted deep in their history, their birth and their experiences. Opium would carry the human horse, the exhausted rickshaw coolie, to a land outside his own experience. From his attap shack he would be transported to a golden palace where girls more beautiful than he had ever seen would offer him their breasts and their bodies. Opium was the one bizarre, unpredictable commodity in Chiengmai. Outside its strange spell we were all clear-cut—animals living for today, taking the sun and the servants, the drink and the women, our work and our play, as it came.

I settled into my teak-and-brick house, Sen Sabai, and quickly adopted the pace and ways of life in Chiengmai. My work was not arduous. Siamese government officials in those days, even high officials, took their duties towards the public with circumspection. The thing that really mattered was that the public should show respect and gratitude for what was done for them in the King's name. The comfort and dignity of the official, not the rights of the citizen, or subject, were what mattered.

This was evident in a number of small ways as well as being a guiding principle of Thai life. We had only one large head-fan in the court and it was placed over the Bench so that the judges were cool, while the pleading lawyers and, of course, the genuflecting litigants, were suitably warm and uncomfortable. It was a great life for those at the top. Fortunately there was enough rice and fish for everyone so that there was no hunger. The sun was an eternal benediction. Shelter in the temples was freely given. Want was unknown; the needs of the people were few and Buddha, in his bounty, had given them the essentials of life in abundance.

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Although appointed on the recommendation of the British Government through the Attorney-General in London, once appointed I was a Siamese government official, receiving my salary from the Thai Treasury, and subject to the overall discipline and directions of a Siamese Minister of Justice who usually acted through his Under-Secretary, the official in whose hands were all the administrative matters of the Ministry. The King, of course, knew all about his advisers, but he let his Ministers deal with them. In Chiengmai this meant that I was very independent and, at twenty-six, master of my own affairs.

It did not at first occur to me that my legal work would bring me into contact with the two aspects of life that were to have dramatic consequences for Henry and for myself—elephants and opium. I also learnt a great deal of the third factor always present in Chiengmai—women, and Lao women in particular—so that when the play reached its crisis and stormed to its finale, it seemed to have a certain predictability. It followed the pattern of the cases I had tried in court. The beauty, passion, fierce dignity and gaiety of the Lao women were revealed for me in one case after another.

The second case in which I sat—with Chow Rart and Phra Salop—concerned an elephant, and an unusual one. The Borneo Company was sued for damage said to have been done by one of their working elephants when " on *musth*." This was a strange condition, probably sexual in origin, but whose main manifest indication was an oily excretion on the forehead of the beast affected. I got to know the signs of this elephantine madness very well, for there were signs other than the excretion. The beast would be fidgety and restless. He ate irregularly. He was in turns indolent and almost savagely industrious.

In this case the damage done by the beast had clearly been exaggerated to swell the damages claimed, five thousand ticals, equivalent to over five hundred pounds. But damage had been done. Had it been done by this beast? The farmer plaintiffs said yes, they had seen it ravaging. The company said no, it had never wandered. Alternatively, they said that if it had done some damage it was very slight, more than covered by the hundred pounds they had paid into court.

We were invited to see the elephant ourselves and we did so. It was tethered in a gully not far from the vast Borneo Company compound. At first it appeared tractable enough. It responded when its mahout called. I examined it more closely. The dried oil of the excretion was still just visible on its forehead. Its period of savagery was nearly over.

As we were leaving the elephant stood as still as a frieze, its small glinting bloodshot eyes transfixed on something I could not determine. It was the red jacket which Tok was wearing, the mahout said. I did not know that elephants shared with bulls the hatred of the blood colour, but it is so.

As we were walking away the beast trumpeted in a furious cacophony of bellows, straining at its tether and on the point, so it

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appeared, of breaking it. The mahout rushed back, seizing a pronged steel fork we had not seen. This he dug into the beast's hindquarters. The elephant stood there enraged, trembling, but silenced.

It was a difficult case to determine. The evidence seemed to show that the beast had in fact escaped—once. The mahout. annoyed by this, had probably ill-treated it since, and a war had ensued between the man and the beast, the mahout taking every opportunity to hurt and humiliate the beast, and the elephant waiting, waiting for the day when, in one quick movement, it could stamp the life out of its tormentor.

In the end we awarded two thousand ticals to the farmers. The Borneo Company were not very pleased. The farmers were delighted. The mahout was sacked. I was told that in six months the elephant was as quiet and good as any in their stable.

I had begun to learn about elephants.

It was just three months after Henry had gone to his forest that the Songkran holiday was held. This was a delightful Festival of Spring. Strangers in the street throw water at one another and there is much gaiety for a week. No work is done. The water, of course, is the symbol to wash away the sins and sorrows of the old year and come cleansed to the new.

I decided to join Henry in the forest for the holiday. Then, out of the blue, I was stricken down with " Chiengmai 'flu." It was virulent, no doubt a form of Asian 'flu. Dr. Cort was away. I called Luang Awat, a local magician and doctor. I was already past the worst when he arrived. His remedy? Half a bottle of champagne and a shot of morphine. It made me delightfully relaxed in a sensuous, un-British way. I asked Luang Awat whether his prescription was not rather dangerous.

He smiled. " It's effective," he said.

It was. Next day I was ready to make the journey . . .

I had little time to organise my party, which was to make the two-hundred-and-fifty-mile journey to Muang Sutep, where Henry had a bungalow and his headquarters, but I was able to do so quickly largely because, before the revolution of 1932, the words " *mai dai*," meaning it cannot be done, were not in polite currency in Siam. No subordinate ever used them to a superior. If proposals were difficult they had somehow to be carried out, quickly, cheerfully and, if possible, efficiently.

A great deal of importance was attached to the expression on people's faces. Scowling, surly service was treason. Fortunately the Lao people are cheerful and humorous by nature, so that it was natural for them to smile as they worked. I do not know whether manners make the man but the old rulers of Siam thought they did, and each grade of Society expected, and obtained from those beneath it, genuflecting, cheerful service for a wage which was still regarded more as a gift for which the recipient appeared to be grateful.

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Though life was sweet and gay for those at the top, those at the bottom had three great blessings: the sunshine, a house of their own, and enough rice and fish. I do not think I could have enjoyed myself as I did had there been hunger or unemployment in Siam. There was neither. Above all, of course, the Buddha, remote yet curiously personal, gave to the people of Lao a philosophy that enabled them to accept with composure the reverses of life, and taught them that both compassion and gratitude were positive virtues.

Tok drove me to the Forestry Department. There was one Englishman in the department, a charming and gentle elderly man, Herbert Garrett. But his work was to collect and classify the fauna and flora of the north. The head, as usual, was a Siamese.

This was characteristic of the Siamese Civil Service at this time. The British and the French were all in subordinate positions, even the British Judicial Adviser was subject not only to the King but to the Siamese Minister of Finance. One American in the service acted as adviser in the Foreign Office and he was subject to the Siamese Minister of Foreign Affairs. The system worked smoothly and well. There was no friction.

We carried out the orders of our Siamese superiors as cheerfully and as quickly as my party was now preparing my journey to Muang Sutep.

King Prachadipok was a great believer in what, with unabashed gusto, he called " English gentlemen." This usually meant that his British servants were Etonians but if, sadly, no Etonian was available for the job, he would tolerate other public schools as he did in my case, provided the family background of the young man could be described, with reasonable accuracy, as being of the upper classes.

This unconcealed snobbery may well have had its drawbacks, but I feel it had one compensating characteristic. None of the British advisers suffered from any kind of inferiority complex themselves which made it easy and natural for them both to take and give orders. None of them, as far as I know, had any race prejudice. On the whole they were as serene, as natural, and as friendly as their Siamese overlords. Perhaps, without knowing it, we had in our small field developed a unique society that may even yet be a pattern for the future.

Luang Suthiart was the Chief Forest Officer and when I explained that I wanted to join Henry for a holiday in Muang Sutep he smiled.

" Is it your first time in the Siamese jungle? "

" Yes. Or any jungle . . ."

" I envy you. There is nothing as exciting as one's first jungle trip. You are entering another kingdom, you know . . . Not our kingdom; the domain of the animals. You'll sense it as soon as you have shaken off the city and the ricefields. All my officers are out otherwise I'd love to join you. We can fix you up with two new tents I have just received from Bangkok. I will lend you three

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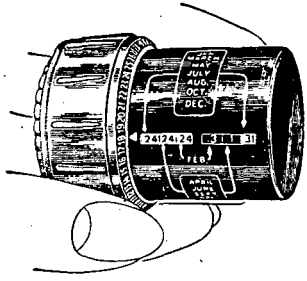

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ponies and Nai Rut. Nai Rut is half Lao, half Burmese. He is most efficient. He will run your life for you if you let him." Luang Suthiart added, " He is loyal."

" I am most grateful. Is there anything I should take or know? "

" You have a gun? "

" Yes, a twelve-bore."

" Take a revolver, too. You are very unlikely to need it, but you never know in the forests. If any of the illicit opium people see you they will avoid you, but you might stumble on them by mistake. If you do, pretend you have seen nothing, know nothing, and will tell nothing . . ."

We chatted for another half hour. There was always plenty of time in Siamese government offices. Only the ministers in Bangkok had a secretary, who kept their appointments which, in any case, they were in the habit of ignoring or changing constantly on the abiding principle that the people must please the Prince, not the Prince the people.

Luang Suthiart called Nai Rut. He came in bowing first to his chief then to me, a fat jolly man in the early thirties with very bright eyes that seemed to see comprehensively. I had the impression of an alert brain, but here too, with the smiling good humour, was, I thought, courage and a certain dignity. I felt confidence in Nai Rut. I was happy that he was to be my man on this my first expedition.

Luang Suthiart smiled again. " You could not be in better hands," he said. " Nai Rut knows all the tricks of the trade."

By six o'clock that day the party was encamped in my garden ready to move at dawn: three Shan ponies, two tents, one for myself and one for Nai Rut, Tok, and the three baggage men and grooms, the baggage itself, the guns, and cooking gear.

Tok called me at four the next morning and by half past we were on our way. For two days we were travelling along " roads " that had been washed away in the monsoon and would not be rebuilt unless a prince or important minister wished to pass this way. We were hemmed in by ricefields, but at night we always contrived to pitch our tents near the twisting river, the Meiping.

This served a double purpose. We could all bathe at dawn before we moved, and we all had fresh fish for breakfast. Tok would lay the lines at night, just a stout twine with a hook and a piece of gristle meat firmly fixed to the hooks which were, I recall with pleasure, made in Birmingham. At dawn or before he would draw in the lines with a gentle even pressure on the pull, and four out of the five hooks would have its tired, struggling captive. Sometimes an eel would be thrown back, but they were not common. The river fish we caught, the *pla duc* and *pla chorn*, were good eating.

Nai Rut was a good cook. He believed in herbs and garlic and butter. He also kept on his person a bottle of red wine and this he used to cook my dishes. It was in these small, flattering little special services that the Lao excelled. Life for those in authority

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had to be made as charming as possible by thought, word, and deed.

We reckoned that it would take us a fortnight to reach our destination, but it was on the fourth day out that we entered the true jungle. The path led up into the hills and we marched from dawn until around eleven. If we felt energetic we marched again between five and seven. We left the river which had become our friend and its place in our lives was taken by the little mountain streams that laughed and cascaded down the hills without a care in the world. Unfortunately they did not yield a fish harvest, though we could still bathe at dawn, but here the water was cold, unlike the warm embrace of the great river.

Although I knew that the Siamese "jungle" was open jungle, the opposite to the close humid jungle of Malaya, I had not expected it to be as open as in fact it was. I thought the word "jungle" was a misnomer to describe this virgin forest hill country. There was very little jungle grass or typical cat country. This was the forest and stream land of the deer and the bears, especially the small honey bear. If there were any of the great cats around we saw none. But from time to time the great mound of excretion that an elephant leaves was in our path.

When this happened Nai Rut would examine it to see if it was fresh so that we should not stumble unwittingly on a herd downwind when the herd would smell us before we saw them. The elephants, too, were elusive. Their mementoes were hard and caked by the sun; the powerful elephant smell had already departed from the dung, washed away by the weather.

The cheerful little monkeys of north Siam were our constant companions, usually hidden, but calling to us as we passed by, derisively it seemed to me. It was the first time I had heard the lovely echoing call of the barking deer, so clear, resonant, and cajoling. The deer itself might be in a valley two miles away but its call came to us as if it were in a thicket nearby. It was the most hauntingly lovely sound that I have ever heard nature provide.

As we marched Nai Rut said, "From now on, Nai, we are travelling through the animals' kingdom." They were the words that his master, Luang Suthiart, had used. As I listened and learnt I realised how true they were.

I think the extraordinary impression of passing out of the world of men was enhanced by the absence of all human sound. When the monkeys were not crying or the deer calling there was an unearthly stillness. The stillness that one could feel courted one as the march went on, only to be broken by the call or cry that seemed to accentuate it. We were alone, a little party of men, surrounded by the animals who were still lords of the jungle.

There did not seem to be an absolute, sharp barrier between the country of men and that of the beasts, one merged into the other. But now we were over the frontier I knew different values, another code, and a loneliness and freedom that I had never met before.

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elephant herds that had not yet been tamed. It was untrammelled, gloriously free. The great teak trees that appeared as we climbed were our friends. And the tree orchids that clung so tenaciously to the lesser trees were indescribably lovely.

It was at the end of the first week, on a Sunday, that we met a caravan by the side of the path. Three men had drawn up, their ponies tethered outside. They must have heard us approach for they jumped down from their little home, guns in hand, to meet us.

We halted; Nai Rut went on alone to talk to them. I looked closely at the three. Two were obviously servants, but the leader, a tall, fine-looking youth of about twenty, was handsome, his good looks marred only by an aspect of suspicion and cunning. It was some minutes before he smiled. Then he waved his men back.

I went forward. Nai Rut introduced me to the young man.

"Chow Kavalongse, Nai."

We shook hands.

"You are going to join Paget?"

"Yes, he's a friend of mine."

"I hope you have a good journey." Then he turned on his heel and joined his servants. It was oddly abrupt. For some reason Chow Kavalongse wished to give nothing away . . .

He was a nephew, Nai Rut said, of the Chow Luang of Chiengmai, but by a minor wife, a dancing girl whom the Prince had taken as a *mea noi*, a little wife, in his younger days. What the young man was doing here I did not know and clearly he had no intention of telling me. As we moved on, there was a suggestion of relief among the porters. The meeting with Chow Kavalongse had meant something, but what it meant I did not know until next day. I did not ask Nai Rut to enlighten me. Instinct told me to say nothing. There is a Lao proverb: "Silence often brings its own rewards."

It was just before we had settled down to our marching pace next morning that part of the answer came to me.

We were walking on a twisted path along the hillside, the dawn breaking. Immediately below us was a valley, then another hill. I noticed the valley was white. Shrouded in the white mist of morning, I thought. Then I looked more carefully. It was not mist. It was a million white flowers.

Nai Rut saw my look of surprise.

"The poppy, Nai. Now you know why the Chow was here."

I looked at the white-shrouded valley more carefully. It was clear now, the giant carpet of white flowers with, here and there, a patch of red poppies for all the world like the erratic casual designs in a fine Persian rug added by the children after their elders have wrought the main design.

Nai Rut was looking, too, at this lovely sight.

"Today it is a white valley, Nai. But the flowers are ripe for picking. In a week's time maybe there will be not a trace of the

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harvest of the valley. Chow Kavalongse will have told his men to reap. They do it very quickly with the great curved knives of the north. Then, somewhere, we know not where, the flowers will be dried out in the sun, the juice will be extracted—the liquid of a million dreams."

"The police know nothing of this?"

"Who can tell, Nai? Perhaps not. The poppy comes and goes quickly. This valley may not be used again for years. There are always other valleys. We must see nothing, say nothing. It is the way of safety. Talking in this business means death. I think you know this already?"

"Yes, I have been warned. But where do the monopoly grow their opium for the Government, the legitimate trade?"

"Oh, that is mainly grown around Chiengmar. It is convenient and, of course, there is no need to hide it. The authorities know that if the poppy is sown in the jungle extensively it is not their sowing but the work of the unofficial growers."

"Unofficial? Illegal, surely."

"Yes, Nai. But when the Government are short of supply they buy, too, from the smugglers. The smugglers hate to sell at Government prices but they will do so to keep the officials sweet. And then there are the great rewards to informers, and the giant fines imposed by the courts. It is a most complicated business, Nai. Only the growers get very little. They are paid in opium as much as possible. In money as little as they will take. This pleases the opium men. It makes the growers their slaves. It also secures them very quick labour.

"Have you seen a drugged man working, Nai? He can do the work of three men for hours on end while the drug lasts, then he collapses and must be given time to smoke. Yes, it is an evil trade. But that is why this white harvest you see can be swept clean in three days so that no trace is left."

I was becoming hardened to the march now. My feet, at first soft and sore, were no longer a trouble. I was twenty-six and very fit. The sheer joy of being alive was urgent and came to me especially on rising at dawn and when, tired, we slept so easily at night.

We decided not to stay in Chienghai but to bypass it, breaking off to pay one visit to the little town in the evening.

Luang Suthiart had assumed that we would spend a night or two at the Government Rest-house, an old Lao palace, at Chienghai, but my own feeling and that of the men was against this. In our ten days we had become accustomed to the freedom of the jungle and we viewed the little city with its closely congested market almost with suspicion.

We strode in in the evening and had a Chinese dinner at the only restaurant in the town that belonged to a smiling, grossly fat Chinese, Ah Tiang, a character in the north, and, people said, rich as only a poor Chinese immigrant can become.

Ah Tiang gave us all he had that evening. Duckling cooked in garlic and killed, I was told, by draining the blood from the bird, a

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refined Chinese torture said to preserve the tenderness of the flesh, bamboo-shoots, plovers' eggs, green and old and sour, very invigorating for young foreign gentlemen, cups of pale Chinese tea in porcelain handleless cups, German beer, and a little brandy. It was almost a feast.

After dinner we stopped at a Chinese theatre where they were performing a love play of old China. I remember only that the mandarin father was ferocious in his gold swirling cloak, the hero alternately love-sick and swashbuckling, and the maid herself, an electric little kitten with very large eyes that seemed to have an X-ray quality that bored right through you, so brittle and bright were they.

As we streamed out into the market again Nai Rut said, "The men, Nai, they would like to stay a little longer. They have had no women for ten days."

"Of course. By all means. Tell them to be back in time to get some sleep before dawn."

As we turned to pick our way through the fields to where our two tents were pitched, Nai Rut said a little nervously, "Very sorry, Nai. No suitable girls there for you. Only the young market women."

I lied, I hope, convincingly. "It never occurred to me. Don't worry about that."

Nai Rut looked relieved. He walked ahead of me with his torch, picking his way along the uneven bund of the ricefields. That night I slept as soon as my head touched my pillow. During the night I woke only for an instant to hear the men creeping into their tent as noiselessly as snakes returning to their holes.

Next morning at dawn we were off again on the final lap of our journey, the last fifty miles to Muang Sutep. We were travelling east now into the sun in the morning, and always the way was upward. We were more than two thousand feet above sea level, the air was fresher, and the giant teak trees dominated the scene. To cut one of these, I thought, would be sacrilege, but I was destined to see a great deal of teak-felling in the weeks ahead.

There is always a sense of excitement as one nears the end of a jungle journey. This one had had no great hardship. It had been most efficiently organised by Nai Rut, but we were to see friends again, our routine was to be broken. We were rejoining the world of men.

Muang Sutep could hardly be called a village, far less a town. There was a temple, a cool, delightful place where the priests fed daily their large tame carp that swam in an ornamental pool, putting their heads out of water to receive the rice balls the priests handed them. There were three or four Lao houses on stilts, and there was one little shop, run, of course, by an enterprising Chinese, that sold hair cream, rice, combs, scythes, nails, cloth, stamps, naphtha lamps, torches, paper—both writing and the other kind—fruit, teak elephants—beautifully and expertly carved—fishing-hooks, and, Nai Rut said, opium, under the counter.

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Henry had sent his headman into the village to meet us with a message that he was busy preparing for us and hoped to see us as soon as we could reach him.

We waited until evening to make that last little five-mile march. For some reason it seemed longer than ten miles had before. Perhaps the hidden tension of the journey had already been broken. Our stored energy had relaxed. We were disinclined for further effort. But, more slowly than was our custom, we achieved it, walking the last half mile at a fine swinging pace as if we were a Guards regiment.

Nai Rut had always said that I should ride one of the Shan ponies, but I had refused. I was still my Cambridge rowing weight of eleven stone three pounds, but that seemed to me a colossal burden for a pony no more than twelve hands. So as we reached journey's end our three ponies were carrying our packs as usual. Nai Rut marched ahead as he had always done, but now with a happy smile he dropped behind me. I was, it seemed, to lead the little party on arrival. The experienced sergeant had handed over to the young officer.

We could see Henry's camp now slightly below us to the left. A little teak house, four tents, and five or six elephants grazing. One towering over the others I recognised instantly as Pra Chorn.

The porters broke into a song then current in the dives of the northern villages, the words I thought curiously inappropriate. The last two lines ran:

Tuk Khun pen Assia,
Krua mea tamai ?

Roughly translated:

We are all rich men,
Why should we be afraid of our wives?

Henry ran out to meet us. He was harder now in body and browner too. The sun was telling its story. But the green eyes were gay when he smiled. The sight of him instantly reminded me of the little niece of the Chow Luang, Wanta. The image of Henry seemed to evoke hers.

He held out both hands.

"Am I pleased to see you!" Then, turning to the men, "Welcome, all of you, to Muang Sutep."

This was answered by that lovely salutation of the Lao people, the brown hands raised as if in prayer.

We had arrived.

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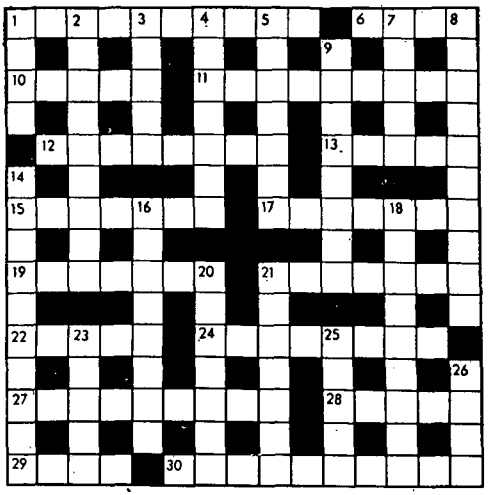

ACROSS

1 Act which should be up to scratch (4, 6).

6 Gulp back the stopper (4).

10 Of Nature, perhaps (5).

11 Icelandic nursery equipment ? (4, 5).

12 Graham Greene's was quiet (8).

13 Hands are—face down (5).

15 Tennyson's brook! (3-4).

17 Stan's strong suit (7).

19 Bygone insect in ceremonial flight (3-4).

21 R.S.M. is, usually(7).

22 Language ! (5).

24 Aquatic contest for factory ? (4-4).

27 Does it surge around a headland ? (9).

28 Indian twister? (5).

29 Lumpkin or Weller, of course (4).

30 Lying inns for down-and-outers (4, 6).

DOWN

1 Musical instrument —from Scotland (4).

2 Smooth new fivers ? (4, 5).

3 Bunter's friend ? Not Horace! (5).

4 Trophy for 24, perhaps (4, 3).

5 Derailed—in the case of trains (7).

7 A nail, point upwards through the tropical creeper (5).

8 True Christian friend (10).

9 Golfer's bad day ? No, cricket ! (3-5).

14 Filch a piece of the bridle (7-3).

16 Keeping fit—on B.R. (8).

18 Toilet requisites, strictly for squares ? (4, 5).

20 Pain Tom feels for percussion section (7)

21 Salesmen—or Peter, perhaps (7).

23 East and West, presumably (5).

25 Reverse of this page (5).

26 Slap-up friends (4).

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